

The BUFFALO BILL STORIES

Devoted To Far West Life



**BUFFALO BILL'S
MEDICINE TRAIL**

**OR PAWNEE BILL,
KING OF THE ROPE**

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"BUFFALO BILL"



Suddenly an Indian appeared at the opposite end of the rope
and stooped to cut it with his knife.

THE BUFFALO BILL

A WEEKLY PUBLICATION



STORIES DEVOTED TO BORDER LIFE

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BUFFALO BILL'S MEDICINE TRAIL;

OR,

Pawnee Bill, King of the Rope.

By the author of "BUFFALO BILL."

CHAPTER I.

RAMON CORRAL.

The dull booming of Indian drums reverberated in the hills.

"Ee-yah! Ai-ee-yah—yah-h!"

The song of the Indian dancers rose slow, monotonous, emphasized with indescribable grunts.

The scene was a small valley ringed round with fire-scarred peaks. The dancers were a dozen in number, barbarically painted and feathered. At one side, on the ground, sat the drum beaters, hammering the drums with their knuckles; and beside them squatted Blue Moon, leader of the Tali Indians since the discomfiture and disgrace of the medicine man, Nekomis.

"The Talis must grow strong of heart," said Blue Moon, as if speaking to himself; for indeed he could not have been heard above the din of the drums and that chanting song of the dancers. "They have been a weakling race; but now they must become warriors. For the white men are coming to drive them out and take them to the far-away prison pens, where they will die like the eagle that is captured on the hills.

They have been slaves, through the falsehoods of Nekomis; now they must be men and warriors!"

"Ai-ee-yah! Too-it-pah—yah-h—ah! Ee-yah—ah-h! Hoa-is-tee-pah! Yah—ah! Sho-ni—kee—wah—iss-tik-wee! Ai-ee-yah!"

"Listen! The Talis are men! Yes! Listen again! Strong men are we! Hear! We are the thunder and the lightning that strikes. Listen!"

So ran the words of the song, in the Tali dialect.

The dance was a grotesque and slow hop, with pauses; the body stooped forward. Round and round they went, in single file, now and then striking their hands together.

Somewhere, skulking in the hills, was the disgraced Nekomis, hiding for his life. A year before he had been the all-powerful medicine man of the Talis, whose word was law; for he was supposed to have received the approval of the hill spirits.

Buffalo Bill had laid his pretenses bare, and he was now hiding from the Indians he had deceived and enslaved.

It is a long story; but the substance can be put into a few short paragraphs.

In the San Felipe foothills of northern Mexico was an immensely rich gold mine, far from the paths of civilization; though the distance to the Gulf of Lower California was not great. The Mexican government claimed all undiscovered mines and minerals; hence it claimed this, though all the knowledge the Diaz administration had of it had come in the nature of rumors.

A set of outlaws under Miguel, the Red, had taken possession of the mine and were working it, shipping the rich ore stealthily by a schooner to a smelter in California. The mine labor was being done by the Tali Indians, who were held in subjection by Nekomis, their medicine man, through fraud. He had set up a statue that talked, as the Talis believed, and gave to them the commands of the gods and of the hill spirits.

To disobey the hill spirits and gods was unthinkable; so when by the mouth of this statue the Talis were commanded to do the labor and drudgery of the mine, they obeyed.

Nekomis was in the pay of Red Miguel; the Tali laborers toiled in the mine without pay. How Nekomis had come under the sway of the outlaw leader the Talis did not even know.

But one day Buffalo Bill came to the San Felipe hills and the mine, to rescue a young man and a young woman held for ransom by Red Miguel; and the great scout's rope, thrown round the neck of the talking statue, had jerked it down and broken it, and revealed within it an Indian who had been doing the talking—an Indian who was a confederate of the crafty Nekomis.*

Buffalo Bill and his party had gone away after that. Then the outraged and undeceived Talis had slain the man who had been inside the statue; and would have slain Nekomis if he had not fled. For him they were still hunting, though many moons had gone by.

Blue Moon, watching the dancers, beat his hands together approvingly as he heard their words. It was the old Tali war song, and he had not heard it in many a day. The Talis were men again, no longer slaves, and their old fighting spirit having returned to them he felt that they would be able to resist with guns the white men who were said to be hastening to slay them.

"Ai-ee-yah! Too-it-pah—yah-h—ah!"

"Listen! The Talis are men!" they sang, with a grunt after the "men." "The Talis are men!"

"It is good!" whispered Blue Moon, nodding. "It is very good! When the Tall Wolf comes he shall see truly that the Talis are men. I have thirty warriors like these—thirty who have felt the sting of the slave work of the mine—and when they meet the white men, who are coming to imprison them, the hills will drip with blood."

At the end of another ten minutes Blue Moon, who had been watching the hills, rose with his blanket draped picturesquely round him; a white man had come

in sight, and was descending the hill on the right, where the trail lay.

In complexion the white man was very dark; the sun and wind of the far Southwest had given him a hue of tan that made his face not unlike that of an Indian. He was supposed to be a Mexican. To the Talis he was known as the Tall Wolf; the Mexicans knew him as Roman Corral.

He had recently worn a beard, but had shaved it off, and left his chin and lip a ghastly white; but he had concealed this by the deft application of a stain that made the color of the skin uniform.

An exclamation from Blue Moon brought the hopping dancers to a full stop and stilled the hammering drums.

"The Tall Wolf comes!" he announced.

The painted dancers, with the drum beaters standing now beside them, stared at the Tall Wolf. They had known him well, but never as he appeared now.

"It is not the Tall Wolf," said one, voicing the general opinion.

Blue Moon, though he also had noted the change, was sure that the white man was Tall Wolf.

Dropping to the rocks at one side of the small space, where the dancing had been done, the Indians sat immovably. Their sparkling black eyes, whose expressions they could not well control, alone showed how lively was their interest.

"Is it Tall Wolf?" asked Blue Moon, staring into the face of the man.

"It is Tall Wolf," was the answer.

"His face is changed."

"But it has not turned against my friends and brothers, the Talis."

"The black hair that covered it is gone."

"Tall Wolf has made his face like that of a Tali."

"That his friends may not know him when they meet him?"

"That he may be one with the Talis," said the white man smoothly, using the Tali tongue nearly as well as Blue Moon. "The Talis are men!"

"Men; and ready to fight!" said Blue Moon, his eyes flashing.

"Far off in the hills I heard the drums; and when I drew near I heard the song of the dancers, which said that the Talis are men and warriors. It is good. If they are not men and warriors they will not long be anything."

"The Tall Wolf has long been the friend of the Talis. He brought us news when the Ixlits threatened us. He sent to us a runner when the Azatlins came over the mountain, and we should have been destroyed otherwise. Last week he sent another runner, telling us that the Black Fox in Mexico City was sending the white men with guns, who will take us to the prison pens, and the runner said, then, that soon the Tall Wolf would come to us himself, with more news. And we were to be ready. The Tall Wolf has come, as he said."

Ramon Corral listened to this praise with the air of

*Read No. 537: "Buffalo Bill and the Talking Statue."

a man who feels that it is deserved. Yet to have done an unselfish thing would have been beyond him.

"Blue Moon has well said," he declared. "Tall Wolf has ever been the friend of the Talis."

"And the men with guns are coming?"

"They are coming, but for the present they have been delayed. Tall Wolf threw a fright into them at the river called Hispaniola; he set fire to the hills there, and the men with guns were near being baked alive in it; so they fled backward toward Mexico City. They lost many of their guns, and much food and clothing. So they cannot be here soon."

Blue Moon clapped his hands.

"Hear!" he shouted.

The grave-faced Indians nodded their heads.

"But there is even a greater danger," said Tall Wolf, dampening instantly the enthusiasm of the Tali braves.

"What can be worse than the men with the guns?"

"The gray eyes from north of the line," said Tall Wolf.

"The Americanos! They are coming?"

"They are here—some of them!"

"Let my brother speak on," invited Blue Moon, catching his breath.

"My brother remembers the gray eye that the Northern Indians call Pa-e-has-ka, and the white men call Buffalo Bill?"

Blue Moon bowed his head.

"Ai," he said; "and Pa-e-has-ka, as Tall Wolf knows, has been here; but many moons ago. He it was who threw down the lying image, and because of him Lame Foot died by a Tali knife, and Nekomis has become a fugitive, who will be killed as soon as he is found."

"When Pa-e-has-ka broke the image it was not because he was a friend of the Talis; it was because the Talis were assisting and working for Miguel, the Red, and Miguel, the Red, held captive the young woman and the young man. Blue Moon remembers?"

"Ai, Blue Moon remembers."

"Pa-e-has-ka is not the friend of the Talis; not the friend of any Indians."

"But I have been told that the name means Friend of the Indians."

"Blue Moon has seen the poison spotted snake that looks like the harmless culebra?"

"Who has not? Once I picked one up, thinking it the harmless one, and it bit me."

He showed a scar on his wrist.

"Pa-e-has-ka is the poison-spotted snake that resembles the harmless culebra."

"Let my brother explain."

"He struck the bandits who had enslaved the Talis. Now he is coming to strike the Talis themselves, because they were with the bandits."

"Let my brother say on."

"Blue Moon knows where the Cross Timbers lie, to the southwest? There is the copper mine of El Toro."

"Many Talis live there. But the El Toros, our enemies, are also near there."

"Pa-e-has-ka has sent men to the Cross Timbers, and they are rousing the El Toros to move against the Talis."

"He has sent Americanos?"

"Ai. And now he is coming himself to the El Toros, to stir them to hatred against the Talis."

An expression of rage crossed the face of Blue Moon, and the squatting Indians grunted anger.

"If Pa-e-has-ka has done this," said Blue Moon, "then Pa-e-has-ka dies."

"The Talis are not afraid of the Americanos who follow Pa-e-has-ka?" suggested the crafty outlaw. "If they fear him, now is the time for them to go into hiding; but if they fear him not, let them move northward to the White Cross Springs, and slay him there as he seeks to go southward."

He looked into the face of Blue Moon, then turned and looked at the squatting Talis sitting on their heels near by.

"To show that Tall Wolf is a man of his word, and a friend of the Talis," he added, "Tall Wolf will go with the Talis."

"Blue Moon will let Tall Wolf lead him and his braves against the Americanos; there shall not one of them be left alive. We will strike Pa-e-has-ka at the White Cross Springs."

"It is well," said Ramon Corral. "The Talis have become brave men, as I had heard; they are no longer the cringing slaves they were a year ago. They do not intend to be destroyed by the false-faced Pa-e-has-ka and his murderous Americanos, and they will not be taken to the prison pens in Mexico City. Ai, the Talis are indeed again men. Tall Wolf delights in leading men."

"It was the cowardly Nekomis who made the Talis slaves," urged Blue Moon, puffed up by this praise.

A yell sounded in the hills.

As the white man and the Indians jumped to their feet, a band of Talis appeared there, with a prisoner in their midst, a Tali.

"It is Nekomis," said Blue Moon. "They have found him in his nest in the hills, and now he dies!"

"The Talis are men!" repeated Corral, with approval. "When they know their foes they will destroy them, even though the foes should be Talis. Ai, the Talis have become men indeed."

CHAPTER II.

THE MESSAGE.

Seated at ease under the shade of the pepper tree, before the adobe which for a time Buffalo Bill was occupying in Truxillo, Pawnee Bill puffed contentedly at his cigar.

He was plaiting a quirt, and at the same time, out of sheer enjoyment, he was singing snatches of a song, when Buffalo Bill appeared in the door before him.

"Seems like living again, necarnis," he said. "But

this dull routine wouldn't suit the baron, eh? Nor Nomad."

"Nor you, if it lasted long," said the scout.

"No news from the insurrectos?" questioned Pawnee. "I noticed that the mail carrier dropped some letters into your hands this morning. The only thing I drew was a Mexican newspaper, and all I got out of it was that the editor seemed to have gone to sleep or off on a vacation. There was nothing in it."

"Nothing about the insurrection in any of my mail," said the scout.

"The revolution business is too hot for this warm weather, and they have probably crawled off to take a siesta. I feel like taking one myself," he added.

The noted scout, standing in the door, pulled the brim of his Stetson down over his eyes to cut out the sun glare, and looked off down the trail.

"Hello!" he said. "Somebody coming, and in a hurry."

Pawnee arose, slipped the quirt into his pocket, and sauntered over to the door.

"Right-o. Riding like some one was chasing him."

In the adobe houses scattered along irregular streets a stir of excitement was manifested, indicating that the occupants of the houses had also sighted the horseman.

"If this was in Uncle Sam's dominions now," said Pawnee, "I'd venture that was a pony-express rider with a special message for you; but down here!"

"A rurale, by his clothing," commented the scout.

"Once more right-o. Your eyes are keen."

In a few minutes it could be seen clearly that the rider was in the uniform of the Mexican rurales.

When he drew into the little town he came straight on to the adobe of the scout, where he stopped.

"The American señor, Buffalo Bill?" he asked.

Buffalo Bill stepped forward.

"I'm called that," he answered.

"Then I have here something for you of much importance."

The rurale dropped to the ground, felt in his pockets, and brought out a flat package.

"From the commander of the rurales at Punta Gorda."

With his pocketknife Buffalo Bill cut the cord that was round the package, and took out a sheet of paper.

When he read what was on it he was given a great and unpleasant surprise:

"This is to notify the American señor, called Buffalo Bill, who is now at Truxillo, that several of his friends are at the place called El Toro, in the southern Cross Timbers, and are ill with smallpox. The names that have been brought to me are that of a German, difficult to spell, but which I make out to be Schnitzenhauser, together with these English names: Ralph Pierpont, Harvey Brice and wife, and an Indian who is called Little Cayuse. None of my rurales will go there, because they fear the disease, and it is distant. The El Toro Indians, it is said, have fled through

fear, and the Americans are in a sad state. This is the way the information has reached me. The American señor will know what is best to do. But I may suggest that, as he has written authority from the Mexican government to penetrate into any part of that wilderness, it may be well for him to organize a small party and go to the help of his friends. In saying this I do not want to seem to do more than suggest it. But perhaps he and his friends will also not care to go lest they be smitten with the disease. I am sending this by a swift rider, one of my best men, Ignace Pavlon. At the present time it is all I can do.

"With best wishes for the health of the American señor, I am

PABLO VITTORO,
"Lieutenant of Rurales."

"News of importance, necarnis?" questioned Pawnee Bill.

"Read that," said the scout, and gave him the letter.

He began to question the rider.

"The information was brought by a Mexican who lived in the Cross Timbers and had fled out of them through fear of smallpox," Ignace Pavlon explained. "But as I did not see him, I know no more than that. He had the names on a slip of paper; and they had been written down by one of the Americans, who was not at the time ill of the disease."

"I wish you had brought that writing to me, too," said the scout anxiously.

"It would but have repeated the names as they are on the paper I brought," said Pavlon.

"But by consulting the writing I could have determined which one of my friends is still on his feet," said the scout.

"By this time none are, in my opinion," said Pavlon; "if they live they do well."

Pawnee Bill had blown a sharp whistle of surprise.

"Rather startling, eh?" Buffalo Bill said.

"Astounding. With the exception of Schnitz and Little Cayuse, all ought to be in New York, according to our latest information. And even the Piute and the baron weren't expected to penetrate to El Toro."

Buffalo Bill drew a notebook and pencil and scribbled a few words.

"Give this to your commander, Pablo Vittoro, with my thanks and compliments. In it I assure him of my high appreciation of his kindness."

"And you will go to El Toro to help your friends?"

Buffalo Bill, about to turn to Pawnee, shot the rurale a look.

"It is our duty," he said evasively.

Then he added, in his former manner:

"But you are weary, señor, with your hard ride, and your horse, like yourself, needs rest. Will you not stay with us overnight? And the horse will be put in the stable."

He called to a Mexican boy.

"Matio, put the gentleman's horse in the stable, and

feed and water him; but not too much feed at first, and very little water."

He clapped his hands, and another servant came to the door.

"In the patio, Pedro, set the small mahogany table, with wine and food for the gentleman, and cigars; and do it in haste, for he is weary."

Pedro disappeared with agile feet.

Buffalo Bill brought out a chair and set it with others under the pepper tree for his guest.

"In five minutes the food and wine will be ready in the patio. In the meanwhile rest here, Señor Pavlon."

Again he questioned the message bearer, when they were seated.

The chief thing the scout got, by way of information, was that Pavlon knew nothing more than the message itself declared, but was exceedingly curious to learn if the scout intended to set out for El Toro, and when he would probably start.

"That I cannot tell," said the scout, putting him off. "We must get a doctor—none is here in Truxillo; it is a small place. And we must fit out a pack train, and perhaps hire an escort. It will take time. We cannot go to-day, certainly."

"Certainly not to-day," said Pavlon; "but perhaps to-morrow? And I have been told that the señor is so skillful he needs to take no doctor with him."

"I am flattered by the reports of my friends, but indeed I should not like to set forth without having with me a good doctor."

"One is in Cajon, which is but a league or so away," Pavlon suggested. "A messenger could secure him to-day, and to-morrow the señor could begin his journey."

"That is a good suggestion. I think I shall act on it."

In the patio Pavlon did full justice to the food and drink placed before him; smoked three strong cigars; then curled up on a cot and slept four hours.

When he awoke he ordered his horse made ready and promptly rode away.

"To-morrow the American señor will start, eh?" he said, as he himself set off.

But long before that time, even while Ignace Pavlon was enjoying his siesta, Buffalo Bill and Pawnee had found opportunity for a serious talk concerning the message.

And, unknown to Pavlon, they had sent a rider to Cajon with a telegraphic message, addressed to a certain law firm in New York.

That message read:

"Inform me immediately if Ralph Pierpont and Harvey Brice and his wife are in New York, or in Mexico. Highly important.
W. F. CODY."

The answer came that night, after Pavlon had ridden away. It may be said here that Pavlon, in riding away, went with the idea that the messenger who, he

had learned, had been sent to Cajon, was a messenger to the doctor there.

"Pierpont and Brice and wife left New York two months ago for the San Felipe gold mine, near the Gulf of California, in Mexico.

'NAGEL & BROWNE.'

The name signed was that of the law firm to whom Buffalo Bill had sent his telegram.

Pawnee Bill whistled his surprise again when that message from New York was received.

"Well, I didn't believe it, necarnis; but there it is! Our suspicion hadn't a leg to stand on, after all," he said. "We thought we detected a trap in that message from the commander of the rurales, as we were sure that Pierpont and his daughter and Harvey Brice were in New York. That San Felipe gold mine called them so strongly they had to go down and take a look at it. Just how they connected with the baron and Little Cayuse is something we've still to find out; but it begins to look now that all of them are down at El Toro, and have smallpox. It's a pretty kettle of fish."

"The baron, you know, took Little Cayuse and set out with the idea of getting a line on the present location of Ramon Corral," said the scout as a reminder; "that might have taken them over to the San Felipe foothills, where we were about a year ago."

"True enough! The baron is reckless, and if he thought he had struck a trail he would stick to it in spite of the danger, and the Piute would stay right with him till the end, no matter where that end lay. I had my doubts, you know, about the wisdom of letting Schnitzenhauser set out on that quest."

"He wanted to go."

"Children cry for candy, necarnis, but they don't always get it. He was dying of the dullness and stupidity of the place where we were then, and I know that is why you let him go; the baron thinks that if he doesn't encounter a certain amount of excitement every fifteen minutes life is simply a desert and not worth while."

"Well, say that Little Cayuse and the baron got over into the San Felipe foothills, and that they there fell in with Pierpont and his daughter and son-in-law; what would take them to El Toro?"

Pawnee Bill rubbed his nose reflectively.

"Pierpont is a born speculator, who would chase a prospective gold mine from home to Halifax. It was the lure of the San Felipe gold mine, now the property of the Mexican government, which he probably thought of buying or leasing, that took him down to San Felipe, of course."

Buffalo Bill smote his knee a resounding whack.

"That El Toro copper!" he exclaimed. "There is a copper mine at El Toro."

"There is your explanation, then, necarnis. When they got to San Felipe and had looked that over, they heard of the El Toro copper mine, and had to set out to see it. Schnitz and Little Cayuse came meandering

along about that time. They're acquainted with Brice and with his wife."

"Yes, that's right. Having helped us to rescue Brice and his wife from Red Miguel's bandits out there, they would be willing to act as guides for them. I guess, pard, that explains it."

"It's sure the milk in the coconut, necarnis. Down there," continued Pawnee, "they ran into smallpox and got it themselves. And now——"

He smoked up and stared thoughtfully at the wall.

"Well," he said abruptly, "our suspicions vanish into thin air. The message was the real goods. And, of course, we've got to go. Might as well have satisfied poor Pavlon's juvenile curiosity, and told him we would start to-morrow; for that is what we'll do."

"Yes."

The scout drew up to the desk that held writing materials, and wrote another message to the New York law firm, in which he announced his intention of starting the following day, or sooner if he could, for the Mexican Cross Timbers, where Pierpont and his party were reported to be ill with smallpox.

That will set some of the goldbugs tumbling in Wall Street!" remarked Pawnee, when he read what the scout had written.

That evening the message was sent off to Cajon.

The scout had begun his preparations.

"We'll start at sunrise," he said.

"What about a doctor?" Pawnee inquired.

"I've learned that the one at Cajon is an ignorant Mexican, that I wouldn't trust to doctor a horse; so we'll go without one. We'll take medicines, and everything necessary that we can pack, and when we get there we'll do the best we can. I can't right now plan it out in any other way."

"There's a medical work or two in the padre's library," said Pawnee. "I'll go over there to-night, and if there's anything on smallpox I'll see what it is."

The padre's library had a good many medical books, he found, and he read until his eyes burned and the lamp was exhausted.

Snapping his watch open, he looked at the time.

"Two o'clock," he said, "and at five we start. Guess I'd better turn in for a few winks."

At daylight the scouts were on the high trail leading south from Truxillo.

They had, besides their horses, two pack horses well laden, and were also heeled as to weapons, for the region they were pointing for was notorious as being the home of outlaws, none of whom was worse than the mysterious and dreaded bandit called Ramon Corral.

duty, like theirs, was to watch the border, to prevent gun running into Mexico by American adventurers.

But for two months the insurrectos had been quiet—Nomad said they were "dead in the shell;" so for him and others there had been nothing doing.

Unable to endure the monotony longer, the borderman had thrown saddle and bridle on his horse, Hide-rack, and set out for Truxillo.

"I can have a tork wi' Buffler an' Pawnee, and mebbysy git some news o' ther baron an' Little Cayuse. The Dutchman an' ther Piute cert'inly played in luck, when Buffler let 'em p'int out south'ard ter look fer recent tracks of Ramon Corral; whatever hez happened to 'em, they've been priverleged ter move round, an' didn't have ter jest set, like an ol' hen tryin' ter hatch aigs."

He kicked Hide-rack along the trail, and felt better because he was moving.

"Give ther baron er chainst, an' he'll stir things up, you bet. Never seen er man like ther baron fer thet. Et's jest bercuz he cain't rest quiet nowhar. Et gits inter ther blood, after er man hez been on ther trail 'long's we has. Ef I've got ter sleep fer a week stiddy wi' er roof over my head seems like I bergins ter smother. Whoosh! Et feels plum' good ter git out hyar whar yer kin smell the pines on ther mountains and have the wind eatin' inter yer face. Whoosh! Et's onc't more like livin'!"

But suddenly the borderman drew in on the reins of his horse.

"Some one in ther trail! Waugh! Jest when I thort shore I war goin' ter have ther pleasure o' meetin' up wi' a road agent, er ther like, et turns out ter be er woman! Blame purty piece er caliker, though."

Sight of a handsome young woman on the spirited horse who seemed to be barring the trail made old Nomad wish to turn out of it, though she was so undeniably good-looking; yet he held steadily on.

It was so plain that she wished to speak to him, that as he drew up he pulled off his heavy cap and stopped his horse.

She was young, dark-eyed, with a clear, dark complexion, the cheeks showing a pink flush like rose petals.

It did not escape the borderman's attention that a carbine was tied across the saddle cantle, a revolver rested in the holster, a cartridge belt zoned her waist, and her shapely hands were covered with heavy leather gauntlets.

The dark eyes flickered over him and his horse as if they took, at a glance, the measure of the animal and its rider.

"You are Mr. Nicholas Nomad?" she said, in a voice that was decidedly pleasant to hear.

Nomad would have told you that he was "never er ladies' man;" yet the young woman's voice, as well as her beauty, quite captivated him.

"Et's er cognomen I answers ter," he admitted; "yit seldom in jest thet shape; more gin'rally et is Nick

CHAPTER III.

THE MESSAGE OF OLD NOMAD.

While Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill were at Truxillo old Nick Nomad, their trapper pard, was at the little mud hamlet of Cordovan, a day's ride distant. His

Nomad." He laughed. "Sometimes et is 'Thet ol' fool, Nomad.'"

"I thought I wasn't mistaken," she said. "Though I never met you, I have had such good descriptions of you that I was sure I wasn't mistaken. Mr. Nomad, I have a message for you."

Slipping off the gauntlet, she put her right hand into her bosom, and drew out an envelope.

Nomad's thought was that something had happened to "Buffer;" so he caught his breath, as he took the envelope and opened it.

It was a message written in Spanish, addressed to Señor Nicholas Nomad.

Even in English, old Nomad's education was of the scrappiest; but when it came to Spanish, though he could speak it like a native—that is, like a Mexican—to read Spanish writing was another matter.

He wrinkled his face over it, dug his knuckles into his eyes, and looked again. Some of the words he could make out, and he got enough of them to give him a line on what the letter held.

"Down in El Toro," he said. "Ez I makes this hyar out, young lady, some er my friends has had bad happen chances, down thet way."

"They are ill with smallpox," she said.

"Waugh! Smallpox. Thet's wuss an' more of et. Ef you'll be so kind as ter spell et all out straight ter me I'll be obleeged. Trouble is, lady, I chainced ter leave my readin' glasses back in my shanty, an' thet kinda ties up my readin' faculties, so's I don't git on well, and then ther stuff et is Spanish."

She read the note to him in her mellifluous voice.

Except that the wording was somewhat different, it was identical with the letter the rurale had brought to Buffalo Bill at Truxillo; with this addition: It stated that Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill were at El Toro. It was a very material difference, as can be seen.

"Waugh!" Nomad breathed, when she concluded. "Down in thet pirate country. I don't reckon thar can be any mistake about this, young lady?"

"I can only give you the information that it contains; personally I know nothing about it. But I am a cousin of Mrs. Brice, and——"

"Mebbyso, then," he said, when she stopped abruptly, "ye'll kindly elocidate ter me ther why of their bein' down thar?"

"They went with Mr. Pierpont, to view the gold mine in the San Felipe foothills; then went on from there to see the copper deposits at El Toro. I came down here, instead, and have been stopping at Jaurez. You know where that is?"

"Shore thing."

"I have some friends at Jaurez; and I was to pay them a visit while Mr. Pierpont and his party were down in the Southwest. They were to come through, overland, to Jaurez; then we were to return to New York together."

"Plain ernough," said Nomad. "Only I don't see whe——"

"Some of your friends were down there, and Mr. Cody and Mr. Lillie joined them recently; that is the way I heard it. The news was brought to Jaurez two days ago. When I heard it I was told that you were stationed at Cordovan. So I tried to get some one to bring this letter to you; it was addressed to you, but was brought from the interior to Jaurez by an Indian runner. No one would go. They were afraid of the insurrectos, so I came myself."

Nomad took the letter and looked it over again.

"Et's a quar thing thet Buffer an' Pawnee should cut out from Truxillo wi'out sendin' me word. But I reckon et war a hurry call, and they didn't find time. Or p'raps they thought I ought to stay thar in Cordovan an' continner ter watch out fer gun runnin'; and they knowed in reason I wouldn't ef I found out they had piked hasty fer ther south. Et must be ther way of et."

"And I suppose you'll be going south right now yourself?"

"Waal, I will. This is ther kind o' news thet will make me sling ther irons inter Hide-rack and hit only ther high places. Et's a good five days' journey down to thet El Toro country."

A slight flush stained the clear pink of her cheeks.

"Then," she said, "I shall make my request. I was afraid you wouldn't go."

Nomad looked at her doubtfully.

"Eh?"

"I want to go with you."

"What is thet?"

"I'd like to go with you."

"Waal, et ain't prezackly er trip thet a lady c'd make," he objected. "Yer see, thar's road agents an' Injuns an' precipices an' mean hills ter climb——"

"I shouldn't mind any of them."

"Ye wouldn't!"

"I assure you I wouldn't."

"Bersides," he added, as if this were the final word, "thar's ther smallpox. They've got et down thar, this letter says. Ef you should go you'd git et, too, likely. Then ye'd have er time of et, and yer beauty would be sp'iled, and——"

"That's why I want to go."

"To git smallpox?"

"No; certainly not—I'd simply have to risk that. But, don't you see, they will need nursing down there, and they have no one; I want to go to help them."

"Er waugh! Waal, thet's ernother way er lookin' at et."

"It's the only way to look at it. I had made up my mind to ask this favor when I set out alone to bring this letter to you. And you'll admit that I have some courage, or I wouldn't have done that."

"Yer grit is shore only ekaled by yer handsome appearance," he admitted gallantly.

"Then I may go? That's good of you."

"Still——"

"Don't hesitate again, please. I am going."

Nomad shook his puzzled head, while he folded the letter and put it in his pocket.

Then he recalled the fact that he had not learned the name of the young lady.

"Yer handle ain't passed my way yit, I believe. Not thet I sh'd mention et, but——"

"You mean my name."

"Yep."

"Nita Lobo."

"Ther front part of et ez purty as ye aire; but ther t'other——" He shook his head.

"You don't like it? That's too bad, you know; for, you see, I am not responsible for my name."

"Certin not," he admitted. "Still, Lobo is mighty good Spanish fer wolf."

"And Nomad means a wanderer. I have wondered if that can be your real name."

"Anyhow," he said, "I hope thet your name don't fit yer character same's my name does mine; seems lack I ain't done nothin' but wander an' meander an' trail round sense ever I can remember. An' hyar this calls fer more of et. Waal, 'fore I set out ter-day, I was hammerin' myself bercuz thet town war so dead quiet, an' I had nothin' ter do. Looks like now I'm goin' ter have er heap plenty."

"So you say I may go with you?"

The borderman hesitated again.

"I ain't goin' to say that ye can. P'intedly, et wouldn't be right. You'd git smallpox, er mebbby wuss things would happen. I cain't be reesponsible fer ye in thet line. I'm expectin' hard work, an' maybe er lot of danger. No, miss—sorry ter say et—but jest now I has got ter say no."

She shrugged her shapely shoulders.

"What if I follow you? Just a little way behind, you know!"

"Don't do et—don't try et."

"You wouldn't desert me?"

"Miss, I'd have to."

His cap was still off, and he ran his hands through his tangled, silvering hair.

"Tell ye what I'll do—and et is ther proper thing; I'll escort ye back to Jaurez. Thet won't be so much outer my way. Then I can ride on over ter Truxillo, an' mebbbyso git a line on some facts I'd like ter know erbout why Buffler an' Pawnee deserted me—fer thet is what they did on this 'casion."

The droop of her eyes showed that for a moment she was in a brown study.

"No," she declared, "I can't let you do that; it would delay you; you must go right on south without stopping. I'll return alone to Jaurez. Of course you understand how anxious I am about my friends who are in trouble at El Toro. I could be of service to them, if I could go with you."

Nomad still hesitated; it hurt him to feel that he could not accede to the wishes of this woman.

"It is so important that you should reach El Toro as soon as possible," she added, "that if you say you

will ride right through, I'll take that report to my friends in Jaurez, and be glad to."

"I won't let no grass grow under my feet," Nomad promised.

"Then I can feel that I've done all that is humanly possible for me to do." She put out her gauntleted hand. "Good-by, Mr. Nomad," she said, with a peculiar inflection, that was not lost on his sensitive ear.

"God be with ye," he responded, as he gripped her small hand in his horny palm; "thet's ther meanin' o' them words! God be with ye—on er dangerous trail."

A queer expression struck across her flushing face.

Thinking of it later, old Nomad wondered if it was an expression of regret.

CHAPTER IV.

INSISTENT NITA LOBO.

The old borderman drove Hide-rack no more than an hour on the dim trail leading over the hills toward distant El Toro before he drew rein. He had been troubled all the while.

"Promises is like pie crust," he muttered, "made ter be broken. Et's an old sayin'. Thet black-eyed han'-some gal plum' bewitched me inter givin' ther promise, and now ole Common Sense is spurrin' me ter break et. I reckon as how Common Sense is bound ter win ther game."

He took off his cap, and, as when in her presence, scratched through his iron-gray hair in puzzled fashion.

"Seems like er fool trick fer me, ole Nomad, ter go traipsin' off to El Toro without stoppin' ter invester-gate; when et is five days bad travelin' to El Toro, an' less'n a day would take me ter Truxillo. She war on-common purty, an' she looked plum' truthful. So, what's ter be did?"

He pulled Hide-rack round as the final result; and, finding the spur of the trail that led to Truxillo, he took that. To make up for the delay, and because, now that he had let his imagination loose, he began to feel that something was wrong, he rammed the irons into Hide-rack with such fervor that Truxillo was gained shortly after nightfall.

Throwing himself out of the saddle before the adobe that had housed Buffalo Bill and Pawnee, he strode up to the door and hammered on it.

"Hello!" he said to the sleepy-eyed peon who appeared. "I has come inkwirin' fer Buffler."

He changed to Mexican, when the peon stared.

"Ah, the Señor Cody! It is more than a day now that he has been gone."

"Then the thing I heard was true!" exclaimed the borderman, sticking to Mexican. "I had word that he had set out with Major Lillie for El Toro. Is that true?"

"It is true, señor; they departed but yesterday mornin' in a hurry. They had received a message——"

"Er waugh!" Nomad ripped out, dropping back into

his characteristic speech. "So I'm er mutton-headed fool, arter all! But still——"

Once more he scratched his head. Then he dug out the letter he had received, and by the light coming from the doorway he read it over. Having been told its contents by the girl he could now read it very readily.

"Something quar erbout thet, too!" He frowned at the paper. "This hyar makes out thet they aire at El Toro; while ef they only set out yisterday mornin' they ain't more'n got good started. Er waugh-h!"

He turned to the peon.

"You heerd what war in ther message thet they got?"

"Some Americans are ill there, I heerd. They have smallpox. Is it not terrible, señor?"

"Et is. But ye needn't wrap yer arms round yer-self and shiver like er wet frawg; you cain't ketch et frum thar to hyar!"

He held out the message which the young woman had given him.

"Can you read it?" he demanded in Mexican.

"Alas, señor; no."

"Likely nobuddy kin read nothin', in this dirt-eatin' hamlet," Nomad growled; "I wonders thet Buffler and Pawnee c'd stand et to stay hyar! Waal, I'm off."

He gave Hide-rack a bountiful feed, however, before he started, ate a bite himself, and contrived to catch "forty winks" of sleep. The moon was in the sky, and the time was approaching midnight before he was again in the El Toro trail.

"Lost nigh a day's time," he grumbled, "by givin' way ter my shaky fears! I mout knowed thet no woman ez good-lookin' would be tryin' ter double cross an ole man like me. Still, et is quar—quarest ever—thet ther letter should so p'intedly say thet Buffler is in El Toro. Looks about like et mout er been writ by somebody that didn't connect with all ther facts, ef no deceivin' game warn't bein' played. Waal, when I gits thar I'll know how 'tis."

He continued to turn it over in his mind.

"I'm some mixed," he mumbled; "but, anyway, hyar goes."

He drove Hide-rack on with increased speed.

Shortly before daybreak old Nomad camped. Hide-rack needed rest, if the borderman did not; and needed a chance and time to crop the grass. So Nomad turned the horse on the grass and rolled himself in his blanket. He was asleep as soon as he had lain down.

But at daybreak he came out of the blanket.

"Instead o' hardtack and jerked beef," he muttered, "I'll kindle er fire and cook suthin' thet'll taste better."

On the nearest knoll was sagebrush, with dead roots sticking out of the impoverished soil; and he climbed up to get them.

As he turned to descend, with his arms filled with the fuel, he saw something moving below him.

Dropping the roots, he climbed to the top of the hill for a better look.

"Great jumpin' sandhills!" he gasped. "Ef 'tain't

Nita Lobo then I'm shore a wolf myself! What kin she be doin' 'way down hyar?"

Shading his eyes with his hand, he looked steadily and long.

"Follerin' my trail, b' ginger! But which, sense et is ther main trail, I s'pose she's got er right ter, ef so be thet pleases her. But—she war goin' back ter Jaurez—so she said! Looks plum' like she has pottered down hyar ter see ef I did come on this way er not. But thet is nothin' short o' reedic'lous as an idee."

Still, it stuck to him as he went back, and, having gathered up his armful of dry roots, went on down the hill.

The girl was less than half a mile away by this time.

Without appearing to pay any attention to her, Nomad watched her as he kindled his fire and began preparations for his breakfast. When the smoke of the fire sprang up she became for the first time aware that he was there, apparently; she drew rein, and sat looking at the floating smoke.

After a minute of hesitation she came on; when she rode up she was smiling.

"What a joke!" she cried.

Nomad stood up, looking at her somewhat stupidly.

"Is et?" he grunted.

"I thought you were far ahead of me."

"An' I thought you war shore in Jaurez."

Drawing rein, she sat looking down at him.

"Aren't you going to help me down?" she asked, smiling at him.

Nomad came forward stiffly and assisted her to the ground.

"Now what?" he said, somewhat gruffly.

"You don't seem in a good temper this morning, Mr. Nomad."

"Aw, I don't! Mebbyso I has got reasons."

"You're not pleased to see me here."

"I won't put et thet way, Miss Lobo—b'ginger I don't like thet name!—I won't put et thet way; I'll jes' say thet I'm sorter, kinda mixed."

"I can untangle you."

"Ef you'll be so kind," he said.

"I followed you."

"Waugh!"

"I saw you didn't mean to let me go with you, so I concluded to go anyway."

"You're a reckless young lady."

"Perhaps so. But my friends at El Toro need me—need some one; so I resolved to go, whether it met your approval or not. But I hope we shan't have to be enemies on account of it."

Nomad pointed to the stone on which he had been sitting.

"Set down," he invited. "I'll look after yer hoss, and you'll want suthin' ter eat, maybe. I reckon you still ain't believin' me, when I said this war a dangerous trail."

He shuffled off with the horse and hobbled it by Hide-rack; then returned to the fire.

"I'll put some more worter in thet ole coffeepot," he remarked, "and some more meat in thet fryin' pan; enough fer two."

"So you're going to be kind about it, and let me go on with you?"

"Cain't help et, can I?" He tried to laugh.

Crouched on the stone by the leaping fire, with the dark hill for a background, the red sun of morning shining on her, she made a pleasant picture, even for eyes as old as Nomad's. She wore a short riding skirt of blue, a round blue hat, and the leather gauntlets already mentioned; and still round her waist was the fluted cartridge belt. There was a knife thrust through it, he observed; but her carbine and revolver were on the saddle.

"Fer a woman, ye look plum' warlike," he declared, trying to smile, though he was still very much perturbed.

"That's a compliment? Thank you, then."

"You ain't never been out in er mounting wilderness like this?"

"Never. So I think I shall enjoy it."

"Waal," he said slowly, "p'raps so—I'm hopin' so."

"Why did you go back to Truxillo?" she surprised him by asking, as they ate breakfast together. "Was it because you distrusted me?"

Nomad stared at her.

"However did you connect up with thet information?" he demanded.

"A little bird told me."

"I allow thet parrot war yerself," he said bluntly; "I allow thet you saw whar ther hoofs of ole Hide-rack cut in from thet side trail leadin' off ter Truxillo. Ef so be——"

He shot her a suspicious glance.

"Yes?" she said, pouring coffee into her collapsible drinking cup.

"Ef so be, then," he declared, "you know er thing er two—you shore knows the look of ther hoofmark o' a shod hoss; an' war able ter recklect what kinda marks Hide-rack made over whar fust off I met ye."

"Then what?" she asked, studying the coffee she had poured.

"Waal, I s'pose et is all right; but et's ther fust time I ever war made akwainted wi' ther fact thet in ther schools o' New York they set forth sech intellectooal courses o' study."

She laughed and tried the coffee.

"Perhaps I didn't tell you that I took a course of study once down here in Mexico—under a Mexican caballero."

"No, ye didn't."

"I camped out last night on the side of the mountain where that trail from Truxillo joins this main trail. I won't fool you any longer. Along in the night you passed, and that woke me; and I saw you in the moonlight. So"—she finished the coffee—"I don't

know so much about hoofmarks as you thought, after all."

"Waugh!"

"Isn't that satisfactory?"

"Shouldn't think thet you'd like ter camp out thet way alone, bein' a woman."

"I have good blankets in that roll behind my saddle—if that is what you mean; I was comfortable enough."

"An' ther kyotes didn't skeer ye?"

"I heard none."

"Waal," he said, hesitating, "I can say this—I like pluck, in man er woman; and you has shore got et."

"And you will let me go on with you, without objecting?"

"I reckon I has got to," he grinned. "I reckon I ought ter be plum' excited over ther idee, tew, o' havin' sech good comp'ny."

He proceeded to get up the horses when they had finished; and she watched him. Turning to look at her, he fancied that she had a strange and mournful smile.

"Waal, anyhow," he muttered, "she's gritty, an' I shore cain't let her go on alone. She's detarmined ter go, an' she needs some un ter look out fer her. Goin' ter be war tork, mebbys, 'fore we git through; which troubles me ter think erbout. I'm wishing she had stayed in Jaurez. I reckon thet new wife of Harvey Brice ought ter be proud ter own a cousin who will take sech resks to git to her, so's she can help in this hyar time of trouble."

He mumbled all the arguments over, pro and con, as he brought up the horses.

He had decided to permit Nita Lobo to go on with him, but he was not satisfied with his act, nor entirely satisfied with the girl herself.

CHAPTER V.

THE YANKEE.

A thing as queer happened to Buffalo Bill and Pawnee as they pressed on over the wild trail en route to El Toro. Also, there were in it some points of resemblance.

A series of Indian yells arose, clamorous as the outburst of a band of coyotes.

"Ki-yis!" said Pawnee, and slipped the loop of his rifle off his shoulders, then balanced the weapon in his hand, ready for use.

Buffalo Bill also got his rifle ready, and eased the revolvers that rested against his thighs.

"Indians chasing something," he said.

"And that something is certainly human, from the tone of that screeching."

"No doubt of that, pard."

A clattering of hoofs sounded. Round a bend in the trail came a horseman riding at top speed—a white man, tall and angular. He rode stiffly, and the tail of

a long linen duster flapped out in the wind like a signal of distress behind him.

Half a dozen Indians, riding Mexican mustangs of a size so small that by comparison the riders seemed giants, came into view, also, behind the horseman.

"When it comes to white against the red I lay my money on the white without investigating," declared Pawnee Bill.

His rifle barked, and the dust of the bullet was seen in the trail, right before the Indian who led.

Buffalo Bill sent another shot, and the Indians began to pull back on their hackamores.

By this time the white man was at hand, his heels pounding the sides of his rawboned horse, his elbows pumping the air like the wings of a bird.

"Whoa!" he bellowed, pulling in; "whoa, consarn ye!"

The rawboned animal came to a stop so suddenly that the rider nearly went over its head.

Before giving the man a close look, Pawnee Bill sent three or four bullets, aiming them high, and had the satisfaction of seeing the redskins wheel their mustangs and get back out of sight.

The man had by that time dropped to the ground.

He was a rawboned Yankee, wearing a billy-goat beard. At the moment, though, his staring blue eyes, that seemed popping out of his head, were the most noticeable feature of his homely face.

"I swan tew man!" he ejaculated, as he tried to get his breath. "I thought fer a spell the heathen had me!"

"They were calling your name rather loud," remarked Pawnee.

"It's a mercy that yeou men was here, all right! Still, I was doin' some tall ridin', naow, you noticed."

"I think we had better get back a little," urged the scout. "Do you know who those redskins were—anything about them?"

"I know ez much as I want tew know. They come at me jest like wild cats, raound the bend there; and I kited. Then they begun to yell like all git-aout, and shot arrows at me. One went through my hat."

He pulled it off—a very disreputable piece of headwear—and proudly exhibited a hole in the crown.

They were moving back with their horses, putting a rocky shoulder of the hill between them and the Indians.

"I think I'd better scatter out, pard," said Pawnee, "while you entertain our friend; otherwise, those ki-yis may try to sneak on us."

The scout nodded as Pawnee, with rifle dropped into the hollow of his arm, left the trail, off on the right, and began to work his way along under cover of some bushes.

"It's a surprise to us," remarked the scout, "to encounter any white man in this region."

"I want tew know! Well, it's ruther a surprise to me to meet you two men; a pleasant surprise, under the circumstances. I was travelin' south, and those heathens seemed to be travelin' north, and that's how

we met, I reckon. Or they may've seen me and come fer me, jest because it is their way. I ain't never had much experience with Indians, but if them painted heathens aire samples I don't want ter accumulate any, nuther."

"From the slight view we had of them we think they are Talis. But they belong rather to the west and south of this. They used to be warlike, and made a good deal of trouble, until they came under the influence of certain bandits and were made to work in a mine; that took the spirit out of them."

"I allaow they've sent for it again, and it has come," avowed the Yankee.

"Beg pardon," he added, a second later, "but I rilly don't know what yer name is, and that of your friend; introductions might be in order, yeou know—under the circumstances."

"My name is Cody," said the scout, "but I'm perhaps better known as Buffalo Bill. My friend is Major Lillie—known to fame and the newspapers as Pawnee Bill." He smiled.

"I want tew know!"

"Your name might be in order now—under the circumstances."

"Me? Ever'body knows me, or has heard of me; I'm Adam."

"Last name, or first name?"

"That's all of it; jest Adam."

"Perhaps you will be willing to tell me what you are doing down here."

The stranger laughed—a "ha! ha!" that rolled out queerly.

"Waal, I vum, that's queer naow," he declared; "fer I was jest goin' tew ask yeou that question. What be yeou a-doin' here, ef yeou don't object to answerin'?"

"We were heading for El Toro."

"I vum! So was I."

"What did you expect to find there?" demanded the scout, beginning to study the face of the Yankee more closely.

"Land sakes—it's jest what I was goin' tew ask yeou! What be yeou goin' down there fur?"

Buffalo Bill frowned slightly.

"Answer my questions or not," he said, "just as it suits you."

The Yankee cackled again.

"Oh, I don't mind tellin', on my part; I ain't got nuthin' tew conceal. Truth is, stranger," he admitted slowly, with a glance round as if he imparted a secret, "I'm goin' down there tew find the Garden of Eden."

Buffalo Bill stared.

"Think you will find it?"

"I dunno; last news I had directed me to look there. So I'm goin' tew look."

"Do I get your idea—that you are really looking for the Garden of Eden, or just a land of flowers and all that?"

"Rilly the Garden of Eden. Last news said it's down there."

"And you got this news from where?"

The Yankee tapped his breast.

"Right in here," he said; "it's inspiration. You've read of me—in the Bible. Fust man, yeou know! Why, rilly, come tew think of it, yeou must be related tew me."

"Crazy as a water bug," thought Buffalo Bill.

"So," the man went on, "as yeou're goin' on down to El Toro, an' I am h'istin' myself in the same direction, ther ain't no good reason, ez I can see, why we can't jine forces, and jest go right on together. That is," he added, stooping and peering out into the trail, "if them pesky red heathens don't think that they've got a call to interfere."

"You didn't expect to encounter Indians?"

"Gad hook, no! I'd 'a' looked fer some other way of gittin' daown there, if I had."

He stooped and peered again.

"I had to go down, ye know. Ever sense I was turned out o' that garden I've been tryin' tew find it again."

"Lots of men," said the scout, and he did not smile now, "lose the Road to Happiness and fail ever to find it again."

"Don't I know it—don't I know it?" He bobbed his head so hard that his billy-goat beard snapped like a flag of distress.

"I wonder," he added, "if that partner of yourn ain't goin' tew run into trouble out there? There was a snake in the Garden, ye know; and I s'pose it's natural tew find bad spirits hanging round on the outskirts of it. Indians aire bad spirits, if they ever was any in this world. Say, did yeou hear 'em yell?"

Pawnee Bill came back as silently as he had departed.

"They're out there," he reported, "beyond the bend; but they aren't showing any tumultuous signs of wanting to rush on our rifles."

He looked at the tall Yankee.

"My friend Adam," said the scout quietly, with a grave face; "he says he is down here searching for the Garden of Eden."

The hand that Pawnee had clasped dropped out of his, so astounding was the statement.

"Eh? Did I get that, necarnis?"

"That's right," said the Yankee, wagging his billy-goat whiskers again; "ye got it, if your hearin' is good. And the fact that I've met ye and am goin' on with ye makes it sure that the heathen won't git me, and that I'll find it."

"The Biblical Garden of Eden—that's what you mean?" Pawnee asked, a bit bewildered.

"I never heard of another. Yes, that's the one. And this time I've a feelin' that I'm goin' tew find it." He thumped his breast.

"What kind of a proposition is it that we're stacked up against?" Pawnee Bill asked, as soon as he found a chance for a word with Buffalo Bill.

"You see for yourself."

"Bats in his belfry, eh?"

"It's the only conclusion—unless——"

"What?"

"He has a card up his sleeve."

Pawnee Bill questioned the Yankee after that, watching him the while. But if the man was playing a game, all that Pawnee could make out was that he was shrewd, very.

For an hour the scouts, with the Yankee, remained in concealment, their animals also under cover; but no attack came from the Indians.

CHAPTER VI.

THE YANKEE PUZZLE.

Indications that the Talis lingered in the trail beyond kept Buffalo Bill from advancing at once.

Finding them still there, after he had made another prospecting trip, he decided to camp in the trail for the night.

It did not please the Yankee.

"I vum," he cried, "yeou're 'fraider of the heathen than I be! It's because your hearts ain't right. Go right along an' the Lord will perfect ye. Yeou recklect them Scripture words: 'One shall chase a thousand, and two shall put ten thousand to flight.' Samson he went forth with the jawbone of an ass and smote the Philistines hip and thigh; yeou've read abaout it, and you——"

"We've got the jawbone of an ass in the camp, all right," muttered Pawnee, turning to Buffalo Bill, without hearing the rest of the Yankee's grumbling sentence.

The scout, who was attending to the needs of Bear Paw, his horse, looked at the Yankee with a penetrating eye.

"He puzzles you?" said Pawnee.

"I am wondering if he is the loony that he seems to be."

Pawnee flung the Yankee a questioning remark:

"A while ago, when you bolted into view here, you didn't appear to be as much of a hero as now; how is that? Why didn't you turn round and smite the Philistines hip and thigh, instead of making tracks like a scared cat?"

"Every man has backslidin' times," said the Yankee, unabashed, "and mine happened along about that time. I hadn't got well used tew Indian yells and singin' arrows."

"You will probably get used to them, if you remain with us."

"I ruther expect tew. I'm goin' tew stay by ye. But I can't help thinkin' that if we could hurry on this evenin' we'd git to that Garden of Eden quicker. So it grinds me tew camp daown an' waste a whole night here. I hope yeou understand me."

"I'm blest if I do," Pawnee muttered.

Pawnee Bill stood guard the first half of the night, while Buffalo Bill slept. The Yankee was supposed to be sleeping, too; but Pawnee discovered that he rolled restlessly, and now and then got up and walked about.

"If you will stick to your blanket and get some sleep," Pawnee advised, "it will be better for you."

"I keep hearin' that voice in here," said the Yankee, tapping his bosom; "that voice urgin' me tew hasten on tew the Garden of Eden."

"You will reach it as quickly," Pawnee urged, "by taking rest and sleep when you can get it."

During the latter half of the night, when Buffalo Bill stood guard over the trail camp, the Yankee exhibited the same restlessness, rising at times and roaming round.

The scout, like Pawnee, advised him to stick to his blanket.

Shortly before morning, when that darkest hour before dawn held sway, Buffalo Bill discovered that the Yankee was missing. The blanket roll seemed still to contain him—it was bunched into a heap—but the Yankee had slipped out of it.

But the Yankee came back in half an hour, slipping into the camp as softly as he departed. He tried to get into his blanket without being seen by the scout, but failed; the scout was standing close beside him and spoke, apparently to the Yankee's surprise.

"I vum," he said, "yeou dew move raound pesky sly an' spy!"

"No more than you do," the scout returned.

The Yankee sat up with his blanket round him.

"Why did you leave the camp a while ago?" the scout asked.

"B'jing, I didn't think yeou noticed that!" was admitted. "Yeou've got eyes like a cat, ain't ye?"

"When I'm on guard I usually know what is going on in my camp. Why did you leave it?"

"Waal, naow, I'll jest explain that. Ye see, whenever I lay my head on the ground here I can hear them Indians—Philistines, I mean; seems like I can, anyhaow. If I ain't been mistook, they've been pryin' raound here all night. So I thought I'd jest run aout and take a look, to see if I was right abaout it."

"You didn't see any?"

"No, I didn't. And I can't hear 'em, only when I lay my ear agin' the graound."

Going to the other side of the camp, the scout tested this by laying his ear to the ground; but he heard nothing.

"That fellow will bear watching," was his conclusion.

In the morning the Talis had apparently departed, so the scout and Pawnee broke camp, and took again their way southward, but moving slowly and with extreme caution.

The Yankee was voluble and erratic.

At the approach of evening Talis were again discovered. Seemingly they had all day silently retreated ahead of the small party, in the hope that in some narrow pass they could make a successful attack.

A second night the scouts camped in the trail, with their animals on picket ropes on the grass beside it; and, as before, Pawnee Bill took the first watch.

To all appearances the Yankee slept soundly through

the first half of the night. But when Buffalo Bill stood guard and morning was approaching, he saw the tall figure roll softly out of the blanket and as softly roll out of the camp.

As soon as the Yankee had disappeared Buffalo Bill woke Pawnee and informed him.

"Stay by the camp while I follow him," he whispered.

"Necarnis, I'm on the job," answered Pawnee; "make a hurry hustle, so that he can't get too far ahead of you."

The great scout flitted after the Yankee silent as a shadow, while Pawnee Bill began to walk the beat in the camp.

Apparently the Yankee, after prowling about outside, went round the camp, and came in at the other end.

Buffalo Bill came back at about that time.

"Lillie," he began, then stopped; for he saw the Yankee, who had also entered.

"You were out of the camp again," said the scout, stepping up to him.

The Yankee gave his billy-goat beard a tug, as it seemed in the darkness; then laughed.

"Gin'ral restlessness," he explained, "an' thinkin' abaout that Garden of Eden."

The scout struck a match, making the pretense that he wanted to light a cigar. He did light the cigar, and at the same time flashed the illumination of the match in the face of the Yankee.

He thought he caught a queer gleam in the Yankee's dark eyes, and a sarcastic, yet cunning, look on the homely face.

"Rather resky tew do that," the Yankee objected. "If some o' them Philistines should happen tew see ye they might slam arrows into us, yeou know. And," he added slowly, "if yeou go round with that cigyar showin' a red coal o' fire in the night, 'twould be a signal fer danger; same as flaggin' it tew come yeour way, seems tew me."

The scout was on the point of boldly denouncing the Yankee as an impostor at least, but checked the words. He had no proof—as yet; nothing but suspicions, and they were of the vaguest character.

"Adam" rolled in his blanket, as the scout walked over for a talk with Pawnee.

"I was listening to your talk with that specimen," said Pawnee. "What do you make of him?"

"A lunatic, or a secret enemy."

"Maybe both. Your idea was that he might be slipping out to meet some one beyond the camp?"

"But I found no proof of it. Still, I am sure that those Talis are again hanging round to-night. I heard a rustling in the bushes, and I thought I heard voices. But as the Yankee was coming into the camp on this side at the same time, he couldn't have been talking with any of them."

"It's a queer thing that they hang round and fail to make an attack. We have evidence that they preceded us by day in the trail, and play snake round us

at night. And I thought you were going to get evidence that the Yankee visited them and talked with them."

"Which would have proved him a renegade of the blackest character, planning to deliver us into the hands of Indian devils who are too cowardly to attack us boldly!"

"I don't forget," added Pawnee, "that when we first saw him he was running away from these same ki-yis."

"That might have been a ruse to throw us off our guard—make us sure that he could not be in with them; I've thought of that, too."

"Well, all we can do, necarnis, is to watch him, unless we kick him out of the camp. And, of course," he added, "so long as we have nothing but wild guesses to back that action, we couldn't; it would throw him into the hands of the Talis, if they are his foes as well as ours."

"Turn in," said the scout, "and I'll stand my watch out."

Pawnee preferred to stand it out with him.

But it passed uneventfully.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PUZZLE CONTINUES.

Traveling at top speed, in spite of the fact that the dark-eyed young woman rode with him, old Nomad covered the trail so rapidly that he hit Buffalo Bill's camp this same morning, shortly after daybreak.

"Hooroar!" he yelled, as he sighted it. "You've been buckin', Hide-rack, 'cause I has been slingin' the irons inter ye and didn't give ye enough eatin' time; but now ye see ther result. Buffler ferever! Hooroar! Yit——"

An Indian, crouched behind a rock, shot an arrow at him, and slid out of sight.

"Still," said the trapper, taking a snap shot with his pistol at the vanishing redskin, "et is a cur'us wonder thet Buffler and Pawnee sh'd be hyar, er even hyarabouts, when they ought ter be down at El Toro buckin' smallpox. This is er deescrepancy thet needs ter——"

He was flinging his comments to the young woman who rode strenuously at his side, and who ducked and dodged when an arrow sang at them out of the rocks beside the trail.

Buffalo Bill and Pawnee were even more astonished by the coming of the old trapper and the young woman. They didn't know who the woman was, and Nomad, according to their latest information, was, or had been, at Cordovan, guarding the border there against gun runners.

"Hooroar!" the borderman yelled again, jumping from his saddle and running upon the scouts with both hands extended. "Corraled in yere by Injuns, aire ye? and me bustin' right through 'em, when I didn't know they war thar! Still, et ain't whar I looked ter see ye, not by a long shot. Buffler, Pawnee, this hyar is

Miss Nita Lobo—which I don't like ther Lobo part of et—ther neatest, trimmest young 'oman I has traveled with in many er day. Allus cheerful, no marter; allus ready ter eat hardtack, when she cain't have corn pone an' biscuit; allus ready ter ride all day an' all night, ef so be I thinks I has got ter git right along; allus ez purty, too, as ye see her right this minute. As to her story, I'll tell et later; but this hyar will do fer er knock-down."

"Where dew I come in at?" asked Adam, as this singular introduction was being acknowledged.

He came forth at the side of the trail.

Nomad flung the tall Yankee a glance, and apparently did not approve of him.

"Whyever——"

But he stopped right there.

"You go on with yer handshakin' and gittin' akwainted," he said, "while I jest drap back in ther trail and see what has bercome of them ki-yis what war throwin' arrers at me. Seems ter me ye're kinda keerless, with them reds round ye."

The tall Yankee followed him with his eyes.

"Who is that?" he said.

"That," answered Pawnee, "is Nick Nomad, king of bordermen."

"Oh!"

"The more you know him, the better you like him; and the better you know him, the more you like him."

"Yes, I thought so."

He extended his hand to the young woman.

"I was willing to ride as hard as I could," she said, "because I am so extremely anxious to reach El Toro, and be of service to my friends there. Their condition must be terrible."

"Lookin' fer the Garden of Eden, too," said the tall Yankee. "Too bad, fer all of us, that them pesky Philistines is in the way."

He began to tell her of his search for the Garden of Eden.

"I know now it's at El Toro," he declared, beating his breast; "and I want tew git there jest as quick's I can."

She turned away, but he followed her, and continued to talk of the Garden of Eden.

Nomad came back, his face shining with the delight he felt because he had met his old pards of the trail.

"Queer thing, and I'd like ter understand et," he said.

"Queer that you didn't see any ki-yis?" said Pawnee. "Well, we've found them an odd bunch of thieves, take them by and large."

"Not thet," said Nomad. "Et is this: Whyever, ef you an' Buffler aire down with smallpox at El Toro, can ye be hyar, sound and well?"

"You heard that?" said Pawnee, with a start.

"Et war in ther letter thet she brought me. Hyar et is."

He drew it out.

"Odd enough," said Pawnee, when he had read it.

"I didn't want her ter hit ther trail with me," said

Nomad, "but she would; she hung back, pertending ter return to Jaurez, and then connected up with me, at a p'int whar I jest natcherly couldn't set her adrift, on account o' ther dangers. Yit I must say, sense thet time she has been a dead-game young woman. An' purty! You has sized up ther extent o' her beauty, Pawnee?"

"A handsome young woman. But I think she is Mexican, or part Mexican."

"Don't make no diff'rence ef she is Injun, she's a han'some piece er caliker; my eyes ain't too old ter see thet. But, Pawnee, take et all round, this hull thing is a quar piece o' biz. Now, this critter thet is with you?"

"We collected him in the same way—when we didn't want him."

Pawnee explained briefly, and told also of the suspicious things noticed.

"Only two kinds o' men," said Nomad, "would be huntin' fer ther Gyarden of Eden: A lunnytic what believed in et, and a man what war bluffin' through a game, with cyards and bowie knives up his sleeve. Waugh! Thet is ther truth."

The Talis who had been hanging round the camp, and had proved their presence by sending arrows at old Nomad, disappeared as quietly as before. Apparently, again they had gone on down the El Toro trail.

The old borderman insisted on going ahead, to "cl'ar the way."

"Injuns don't trouble me none," he argued, "fer, yer see, I has fit 'em, trailed 'em, camped with 'em, and even lived with 'em. So I know 'em frum ther grass roots up. An' ef these hyar snoopin' Talis aire plannin' any Injun tricks——"

He had pointed the nose of old Hide-rack into the trail, and rode off, kicking the flanks of the horse, while his keen eyes searched the land ahead of him. Across his saddle before him rested his rifle, gripped in his sinewy hand.

But he found no Talis.

When the journey El Toroward was taken up, the girl dropped in beside the Yankee. This was a matter of course. For the party rode two and two, with the scouts ahead, following old Nomad.

What they discoursed about neither Pawnee nor Buffalo Bill knew, but now and then the Yankee was heard to say something about the Garden of Eden.

At the noon camp the girl and the Yankee kept apart, as if the ride of the morning had been distasteful and they desired no further intimacy of that sort, when it could be avoided. But the Yankee helped her to mount to her saddle, as Pawnee was about to offer his services, and Pawnee caught this remark:

"They're good men!" This was said by the girl.

The reply of the man seemed to be something about the Garden of Eden.

"Ah!" he said, as if suddenly observing Pawnee. "We've been makin' good time. I cal'late a couple more days ought tew put us there, don't yeou?"

"You've been over this route before?" said Pawnee.

"Never!"

"Nor have we. But some information we received at starting makes us believe that we are coming now to some mighty rough going."

The Yankee cackled his peculiar laugh.

"Jordan is a hard road to travel. But yeou can't expect the approaches tew the Garden of Eden to be easy, can ye, naow?"

The girl flushed under Pawnee's gaze.

"If we could all be as sure," she said, "of reaching the Garden of Eden some time as our friend is!"

"All ye have tew do is jest tew keep a-goin'," declared the Yankee. "Every road has got tew have an endin', no matter haow long it is."

"You seem to be a philosopher, at any rate," said Pawnee, rather at a loss for an answer.

"I want tew know!"

The Yankee laughed again, and somehow that laugh cut along Pawnee's nerves.

When the evening camp was made, the girl and the Yankee dropped down on a stone together at one side of the camp, and apparently continued a conversation that had been begun on the trail. They had been heard talking in tones that had seemed serious, and this was a continuance of it.

At last the girl arose, giving her dress an angry shake.

Her eyes were bright as she came over to the fire that Pawnee Bill was kindling.

"He annoys you, does he?" said Pawnee. "I admit that at times the things he says, and his laugh, are rather irritating; though, when you analyze them and your own feelings, always there seems to be no good ground for it."

"Yes," she admitted, as if drawing her thoughts back from a distance, "he does irritate me at times, just as he does you."

"But if he is insane!"

"Yes, of course," she agreed; "if the man is insane, anything he says or does ought to be forgiven."

"But is he insane?" Pawnee asked.

She stared at him.

"What do you think?"

"I'm going to be charitable, and give him the benefit of the doubt."

After the evening meal, while the night thickened over the camp, she sat apart again, talking with the Yankee; apparently, if judged only by what could be seen, she was trying to discover for herself whether the Yankee was insane or was a fraud.

This night Nomad stood guard the first half.

The second watch was taken by Pawnee, and he was sure that the Yankee was asleep at the time.

Throughout the night Pawnee kept his eyes more or less on the blanketed form of the Yankee. The Talis made no demonstration, and the night was one of quiet.

In the morning the Yankee was still in his blanket.

He roused up and asked a question, as Pawnee, walking his beat, passed him.

But when full day had dawned, and the time came for all to rise, it was found that the girl was gone.

"Waugh!" rumbled Nomad, when the news was borne to him. "I brought her hyar, and——" He stood up and looked round. "Waal," he added, "I reckon she'll be hyar in er minute."

But the girl did not return.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MYSTERIOUS YANKEE.

When a search for Nita Lobo was unfruitful, Buffalo Bill and his friends were not only puzzled, but somewhat at a loss to know what to do. They feared that she had wandered out of the camp and fallen into the hands of the Talis, though throughout the night no Talis had been heard.

Apparently as anxious as any one was the Yankee.

"She's in the hands of the Philistines," he said.

He insisted on making another search, and went out of the camp alone, refusing to be dissuaded.

He came back as the horses were being made ready for the trail.

"Didn't see her, and seen no Philistines," he reported.

There were still no Talis in evidence as they took up the trail that morning. Nor were any seen throughout the day.

That night Pawnee Bill courted the embrace of the blankets and dewy-eyed slumber; for he was tired out, and Buffalo Bill, with the borderman, took all the guard work.

Twice during his hours of watching the scout slipped out of the camp and prowled round it in silence, under the belief that he had heard Indian voices near, and had even heard men crawling.

When he came back the second time he found that the blankets of the Yankee were empty.

Promptly he went out again; but not until he had roused old Nomad and left him watching in the darkness.

This time Buffalo Bill had better luck than before. He located a low grumble of voices. Creeping in that direction, though he saw nothing, he heard the voice of the Yankee, and then the voice of a Tali Indian.

"He has found the Garden of Eden here," thought the scout, "and it is inhabited by redskins."

He crawled closer, and though the voices rose clearer, so that he was sure he was not mistaken, he still could not make out what was said; it was in Tali, and a difficult language to him, familiar as he was with so many Indian dialects.

"Plotting with the Talis for the capture of the camp," was his conclusion, as he crawled back into it. "I've got to awaken Pawnee."

He roused Pawnee, and informed him, with Nomad, of the nature of his discovery.

"This hyar Gyarden of Eden lunnytic seems ter be a reg'lar tinhorn," grumbled the borderman.

"A renegade white man, which is worse," said the scout.

"Ef he comes back I sets my fingers into his neck!"

"We'll see what he says, or does—if he comes back."

"Say he is a fraud and a renegade, do you savvy his game, necarnis?" asked Pawnee.

"He intends to betray us into the hands of the Talis—that's all I can make of it now. My judgment is that they're too cowardly to make a bold attack; but are crazy to get at us; and he has joined us for the purpose of helping them, when the chance comes."

"And he thinks it has come now?"

"Perhaps. We'll see as to that."

"Thet gal bein' named Lobo!" said Nomad, who had long worried over that. "Does et mean anything?"

"No more than it means a man is cruel and sneaking because his name happens to be Wolf. Still——"

"Waal, et has got me ter millin'."

"I've been thinking, as we talked here," said the scout. "I was standing guard, you know, and you two were asleep, or supposed to be. So now if you will drop back into your blankets I will go over by that rock and sit down there. I'll make a pretense that I am sleepy. We'll see if anything happens."

He slipped away, and the two men rolled in their blankets; but they were very wide awake, with hands clutching revolvers.

Ten minutes later the Yankee came softly into the camp. In the darkness he could hardly be seen; and the fact that he made not a sound in stepping told that he had removed his shoes.

Slowly and silently he passed close by the forms in the blankets, bent with a jerk, heard the snores they sent up, and passed on, in the direction of the rock where the scout sat now with his Stetson shading his face.

The Yankee paused before the scout, ducked as if he listened; then straightened and slipped off again.

When once more he came in sight four or five Indians were with him. They were crawling, while he slipped along in a stooping position. First they came toward Buffalo Bill, apparently for the purpose of making sure of him.

The scout waited until the Yankee and the redskins were right in front of him. Then the revolver he held went off with a startling report, and he jumped like a tiger at the throat of the Yankee.

Nomad and Pawnee Bill threw aside their blankets and came to their feet. As they did so, they saw the Indians scudding into the gloom, and saw Buffalo Bill drop on his face, then the Yankee gave a leap right over him, and faded.

When Pawnee Bill and the borderman reached the scout's side they found that he had been knocked down and rendered unconscious by a blow on the head.

As the Indians and the Yankee were gone, they did not try to follow them; but while Pawnee gave his

attention to the scout, Nomad hustled to the horses, that for security had been held in the camp that night.

The report of the revolver had set the animals jumping, but the voice of Nomad quieted them. Seeing that they were still safe, the borderman ran over to the side of Pawnee.

"Thet war a raw deal of a play," he grunted. "Is Buffler——"

"Right side up with care, yet," said the scout, trying to stagger to his feet, supported by the arm of Pawnee Bill.

"It was a razzle-dazzle of a—— Hope you aren't hurt much, necarnis."

"Not hurt at all," declared the scout, leaning against the rock.

"Just as well as ever, with your head dented in, and blood all over your face; yes, you sure look it! Here, take a nip of this."

Pawnee drew his mask and held it up, and the scout put it to his lips.

"Ther wine o' life, when a feller needs et," commented Nomad; "and ther wust kinda foolish water, when he don't. However did thet tinhorn do et, anyhow?"

"I was too sure of him," said the scout; "that is the way I explain it. I fired my pistol to scare the Talis; there were five of them, I think, and they were making a sneak on me, right behind the Yankee. Then I jumped at him, and he—was too quick for me, so I got the butt of his revolver right there"—he put up his hand—"and down I went."

"Waugh!" Nomad breathed. "Ther pizen whelp—the A-one liar—the——"

"As I'm all right now, Nomad," said the scout, "just bottle your words, and get onto the job of watching; those rascals might pull their courage together and come back. There are more than five Talis round this camp."

"It's a strange deal," said Pawnee, when Nomad had started to obey; "if they wanted to kill us, they might have done it by shooting into us, either by day or night."

"They seem to be armed only with bows and arrows—mighty poor weapons for warfare, you'll agree; though that they have knives I had ocular demonstration a while ago. At a guess, I should say, though, that they don't want us dead, but alive."

From the Yankee, Pawnee's thoughts bounded to the girl.

"Nita Lobo?" he said. "Did her disappearance have anything to do with this attempt against the camp?"

"Just how? That blow on the head has woolgathared me, you see; so if I don't follow you——"

"It came to me merely as a suggestion, necarnis," said Pawnee, as he emptied his canteen on the scout's wound, and tried to bathe it, "that she might have had a hand in it this way: The Indians hadn't been seen or heard for a long time, you recall. Now, could she have been sent out by this searcher for the Garden of Eden, for the sole purpose of getting them to come

back and make this effort against us, after they had become discouraged and had departed? It's a wild throw of the guess lariat, probably."

"I don't know," said the scout; "my head is fuddled, and I can't think clearly right now. But there is no longer any doubt that this Yankee was a pretender and a renegade, in with the Talis; and that for some reason the Talis want to capture us alive."

"And if you hadn't been wide awake and right on the job to-night, I guess they'd have done it."

He washed the wound, then tied a handkerchief over it as a bandage.

Buffalo Bill put on his Stetson, over the handkerchief.

"I'm all right again, or I will be in a minute or so."

"The tinhorn an' the ki-yis have hit the ghost trail," said Nomad; "gone without er sound! Slidin' shadders would er made a busier noise than they did. Waal, what next?"

"Nothing, until morning," said the scout.

"I'm hoping now," remarked Pawnee, "that the Talis have been given such a fright that they will keep out of our way, and we'll have a clear trail down to El Toro."

"The thing that is beginning to worry me," the scout admitted, "is a fear that when we get to El Toro we shall find that all along we have been against a frame-up."

"Necarnis, it looks it," declared Pawnee. "Take everything, from the start until right now—the messages, Nita Lobo, the Yankee, the sneaking Talis; I'm thinking that when we do butt into the ranch at El Toro we'll ram into a surprise that will lay these little incidents away in moth balls, and make us forget they ever happened."

"Still feelin' weak, ain't ye, Buffler?" said Nomad.

"Like the morning after the night before," the scout admitted. "But I'll be ready for the trail, when the times comes for it."

CHAPTER IX.

THE WORK OF THE ROPE KING.

The trail that up to this time had been reasonably plain, though occasionally it scattered and took on the characteristics of a game trail, ended, a few miles beyond, in a valley that was bounded on every side but the north by precipitous and rocky hills.

When they had spent hours in a vain effort to find a way southward, they decided to leave their animals in the valley, in spite of the risk, and pack the medicines and supplies on their backs.

The bridles, saddles, and all the other things they could not take, or did not need, they cached.

Pawnee Bill's unequaled ability with the rope came in handy now. They had ropes in plenty, and at times had need of them all, for there were places, in the tortuous cañons, when rope bridges, in effect, had to be constructed.

It was interesting to watch Pawnee Bill at this kind of work.

Selecting a finger of rock on the other side of the cañon, he would throw a noose over it and tighten it with a jerk, then fasten the free end on his side. After that he would rig a sort of block-and-tackle arrangement by which the medicine cases and supplies could be "ferried" across; this, of course, after he had crossed over himself, which he did by "walking" the main rope with his hands.

Buffalo Bill and the borderman came after that.

Now and then the precipice path they followed would end at a blank wall of rock, so that they had their choice of climbing over it, or turning back.

There was seldom hesitation on Pawnee's part. After estimating the height of the wall, he picked out some point on it that projected more or less, and landed a noose over it, then climbed the rope like an acrobat or a sailor.

Buffalo Bill could climb with equal skill, but to save the strength of the borderman, who was, because of his increasing years, not as "soopie" as once upon a time, Pawnee often made a rope ladder, and let it down for him.

From the top of the wall a rope would be slid down, and they would descend by that.

Once only did Pawnee lose a rope, that he had to leave hanging on the wall; the others he was able to snap off the high projections by running little wave ripples up the rope, which, gaining in force, "hopped" the noose off.

The ingenious manner in which he conquered rock and rope difficulties that day proved his worthiness to be called the king of the rope.

Half the day was spent in work of this kind, when an unexpected capture was made of a Tali Indian.

A rope had been thrown across a cañon; some of the packs had been sent over, and Buffalo Bill, with Nomad, had crossed; this time leaving Pawnee on the starting side of the cañon.

Pawnee began to cross when Buffalo Bill and Nomad had gone on a few yards to inspect the way.

Pawnee was swinging along with his hands, halfway across, when he was startled by seeing a Tali Indian appear suddenly at the opposite end of the rope, and stoop to cut it with his knife.

Thus caught on the rope that bridged the cañon, Pawnee Bill's famous Price knife came out of his belt and flashed at the weapon of the red rope cutter.

It struck the knife hand of the Tali.

At the same moment Buffalo Bill, who had turned back, came dashing on the redskin, and before the latter could wriggle away the scout had nailed him.

Pawnee swung on, whooping his delight, and landed. Buffalo Bill had thrown the redskin backward, and was camped on him.

Seeing that the odds were against him, the Tali ceased to struggle, submitting, when he had to, with Indian stoicism.

Nomad came running on the scene, drawn by Pawnee's war whoops.

"Gr-reat catypillars!" he screeched. "Whar'd ye find ther speciment?"

"He was cutting the rope," said Pawnee.

The Tali crouched against a rock, when the scout released him, and looked at his slashed hand, from which blood dropped.

"I let him off easy," said Pawnee, gathering up his knife; "the way he was trying to serve me, 'twould have served him right if I had given him the weapon straight."

He repressed a shudder as he glanced into the cañon, and thought of the rocks which would have impaled him if the rope had been cut away by the Tali.

"Search him, Nomad," said the scout; "then we'll see if he can understand us."

The search brought up an odd assortment of worthless things stowed miscellaneously and held in place by strings, together with a small sheet of paper, written over in Spanish:

"He was a message bearer," said Pawnee, "crossing the mountains, and butted into this thing through pure meanness, because he thought he saw a chance to dish me. What does it say, necarnis?"

Buffalo Bill gave this translation:

"I refuse to go further in this matter of trying to carry out your plan against Buffalo Bill and his friends. I find that I am still a woman, and cannot do it. For that reason I left their party. Finding this Tali in the trail, I am sending this message to you by his hand. As for me, you will not see me again.

"NITA LOBO."

"Yah!" snarled the trapper. "Blamed ef it don't sound like a letter from thet gal to old Adam! Aire we gittin' warm ter somethin', er no?"

Pawnee Bill blew out an expressive whistle of astonishment.

"Oh, snakes!" added the borderman. "I don't like ter think thet the han'some young 'oman what I took a likin' ter so well can be mixed up in a game ag'inst us, with thet pizen Yankee. Cain't ye make some other meanin' out er thet letter, one o' ye?"

Buffalo Bill turned to the Tali, who sat crouched against the rock, his staring black eyes filled with the fear he tried hard to conceal.

"Where did you get this?" said the scout, holding up the letter.

The Tali's stare continued.

The scout repeated it in Spanish.

Then he tried the few words of Tali that he knew, and after that other Indian dialects.

Only when the scout resorted to signs did a gleam of understanding cross the Tali's face.

The Tali then made answering signs to show that the one who had given him the letter was a woman: He swung his hands round, indicating a skirt round his feet; made a curving motion with his right hand, from

his head down his back, indicating long hair; pointed to his face, then to the scout's, to signify that the woman's face was white—she was not an Indian woman; then clucked out Tali words, which the scout said was a declaration that she was a daughter of Lobo; and she had sent him, he said as well as he could, with that message to Lobo.

"Where is Lobo?" demanded the scout, by signs and words.

The Tali did not know; Lobo had been near recently, but the Tali had been heading for Lobo's headquarters.

He indicated the distance, by laying his head on his arm and closing his eyes, to indicate one sleep; then repeating it to denote another sleep.

"Two sleeps to the south," said the scout, when the Tali nodded the direction.

"Jest erbout ther distance to El Toro, ef we has figgered thet out right," observed Nomad.

"The Talis had some horses—we saw signs of that in the trail; what did they do with their horses?" queried the scout.

The actions of the Tali, in trying to answer this, were interesting to watch. Three times the scout had him repeat them.

"Oh!" he said. "I think he means that there is a hole out of that valley where we were forced to leave our horses!"

"You better ask him thet over erg'in," said the borderman. "We don't want ter make no mistake. Ef I has ter climb back ter thet valley frum hyar, I wants ther goods fer et when I git thar. Rastlin' ropes across precerpices mebbysos is all right fer an expert like what Pawnee is; but fer er man o' my y'ars an in-deescraption—waal, et is plum' diff'rent."

Buffalo Bill asked the Tali again.

"That's all I make out of it," said the scout, when the Tali had again tied himself into bow knots, to denote a twisting trail, and almost swallowed his fingers to indicate horses going into a hole.

"The same over here," said Pawnee; "that's what he means. But we couldn't find any hole leading out of that valley."

"You were going ahead," the scout contrived to say to the Tali; "and you can guide us on in the way you were going, so that by and by we shall reach the place where Lobo is."

"I was going to the valley where the hole is—not south," said the Tali, in his sign language. "I could get to the Tall Wolf that way before I could by crossing the terrible mountains."

It took him fifteen minutes to say this. And as a study in sign language it was interesting. The Tall Wolf, or Tall Lobo, he "spelled out" by making the universal Indian sign for wolf, then lifting his hands high and higher until he was stretching them over his head.

"D' yer ketch on ter thet, Buffler?" said Nomad. "This hyar Lobo is some tall, you'll notice, 'cordin' ter ther Tali. We has likewise an' sim'lar had a very

tall critter 'mongst us recent, which his name was Adam, you'll recomember. Et bergins ter look as ef thet tinhorn ombray war erbout all ther mean things ye can think of. Still, I am holdin' back frum statin' positive opinions, on account o' Miss Nita Lobo. Why-ever she wore a name sim'lar——"

He coughed and stared.

"Say, Buffler—I don't want ter express et; but c'd et be posserble thet Nita Lobo war kin ter this Tall Wolf—mebbysos his darter? I don't want ter express et!"

Buffalo Bill bored for information along that line, but without success; there were limits to the sign language, as he and the Tali knew it.

When they had pumped the redskin dry they held a council of war.

After it ended, Pawnee Bill took his ropes and explored the onward way for a hour or so.

"The cañons and precipices get worse and worse," he reported, when he returned.

They decided to back-track.

When they reached the valley again the day was done. Nevertheless, they made the Tali show them the hole which he had indicated.

Straight ahead of him the Tali walked to the other end of the valley. There he stopped, studied the face of the cliff before him in the fading light, and walked on again.

"Goin' ter butt his head inter ther cliff," said Nomad.

The Tali stopped again, where three close-set, wide-spreading dwarf cedars spread along a cleft near the wall; the floor of rock up to that point having been bare granite, though in the cleft was enough soil to support the growth of the cedars.

Stepping behind the cedars the Tali disappeared for a moment.

When he reappeared he was beckoning.

Following him behind the cedars they saw, as they thought, merely the rock wall.

But when the Tali struck a small section of it near the ground with his knuckles it swayed, and they discovered that pasted against the stone was a sheet made of buckskin that had been dyed to the color of the rock, and this buckskin sheet was a door.

The Tali swung it aside, and before them was a hole; not dark, as they had expected it to be, but with as much light seen through it, on the other side, as where they stood.

When they had passed through this cleverly made and hidden door, they found that the rock wall there was but an inch or two thick—a mere sheet of granite; that it had been perforated by the Indians, and then this door had been set in to conceal it.

Straight ahead, dimly discernible, was a plain trail, leading along the base of a high rock wall.

"Waugh!" Nomad exclaimed, in admiration of the ingenuity of the Talis. "Et shore took a hair-trigger intellect ter put er job o' thet kind through. Jumpin' sandhills! Looks now as ef we ain't goin' ter have

nothin' but clean and straightaway sailin' henceforth and ferevermore. Halleluyer!"

So eager were they to take advantage of the way thus opened, that as soon as they had eaten supper they got up their animals and set forth along the hillside trail. They were tired almost to the point of exhaustion by the incessant work and climbing they had done; but the thought that they could now make decent speed stirred them to this final effort.

At midnight they stopped, fagged out, and made their night camp in the trail.

Nomad stood guard for the first two hours.

But the old man could not keep his eyes open.

Falling asleep, he slept like a log till morning; and as he, of course, failed to arouse the others, they slept in the same dead manner, until the sunlight of the new day struck them and brought them back to consciousness.

Nomad's chagrin was then great.

The Tali had made his escape. He had been afraid to take anything—so horses, guns, ammunition, and supplies, including the medicine packs, had not been touched; he had simply lifted his feet and stolen away with the stealth of a fox.

"Waugh!" Nomad bellowed. "Somebody rig er kickin' machine quick, an' git busy with me!"

CHAPTER X.

ENTER SCHNITZENHAUSER.

There was no grass in the trail here for the horses, and no water; the whole country had begun to take on even more of a desert look than any yet passed over, so the scout and his pards were anxious to push on.

By nine o'clock they had reached much lower levels, where they found a half-dried-up water hole, mud-oozy round the edges, but with grass about it.

Beyond this the land stretched on in sandy levels that had a desert appearance. Viewing it with critical eyes, the scout and his friends confessed that they did not like it. Yet the trail they had been following entered this waste. A half mile out from the foot of the hills, when they prospected to see what lay there, they found a continuation of pony tracks; but they had grown fainter, and the sand had sifted in so that the most of them were covered.

"A mile out, there will be no trail," said the scout.

Dancing sand spirals, set in motion by cross winds, waltzed in weird fashion still farther out, and no green tree nor shrub could be seen, but only cacti and desert weeds here and there, the weeds set in depressions, the cacti defying the worst that the heat and the sand could do.

"A bad outlook for the horses, necarnis," declared Pawnee. "Still, horses have passed through here, and what other horses can do ours can. We can fill our water bottles and make a try of it. I guess we've got to—nothing is to be gained by stopping here."

But they did not start until the horses were well

rested and had filled themselves with the grass that grew luxuriantly round the water hole.

They would have delayed even longer, but for an unforeseen occurrence.

Nomad caught sight of a human head on top of a low hill behind him, and, though it was at once withdrawn, he caught up his rifle and sent a bullet at the rock where it had been for a moment only visible.

The result of that shot was about the most astonishing thing that had ever come within the ken of the old borderman's experience.

A man came rolling down the slope of the hill like a ball. Apparently the shot, causing him to jump, had also made him slip, where the soil was but sliding sand; and, having lost his foothold, he could not regain it, and so came rolling helplessly down.

Though he was whirling like a top, they saw at once, by his clothing, that he was not an Indian.

Suddenly Nomad yelled:

"Spinnin' comets! Et's ther baron!"

So it was.

Having rolled to the bottom of the hill, his momentum being exhausted, he began to pull himself together, as the three men from the camp rushed to meet him.

The baron had clung valiantly to his rifle. Now he leaped up and swung it round him; they said afterward that, as he did so, his eyes were shut.

"Go 'way!" he yelled. "Kvit idt! Oof, you try to timmyhawk me I vill make sissage meadt oudt oof you. Standt pack pehint yourselfs, you retskin——"

"Whoa, Nebuchadnezzar!" Nomad bellowed at him. "Stop turnin' round so fast, an' look at yerself onc't."

The baron stopped.

"Yiminy Christmas!" he said. "Idt iss nit—idt iss Nomadt."

"You must be dizzy-headed by now, baron," Nomad observed dryly. "Whatever did ye think you war doin', anyhow?"

"Idt iss also-o Cody unt Bawnee!" gasped the baron, as if he could not believe his eyes.

"Sure thing, Schnitz!" cried Pawnee, stepping forward with outstretched hand.

"And the sight of no one could be more welcome," added Buffalo Bill, also advancing.

"Budt meppyso I am treaming sweet dreams," the baron objected. "Aber I am not, idt iss der habbiness oof my lifetimes."

"You're all right, baron," said Pawnee, wringing the German's pudgy hand. "But I must say that your way of entering camp was a bit spectacular."

The baron shook hands gravely.

"Now vare iss der Inchun?" he said, when he had concluded all round.

"Which one?" asked Buffalo Bill. "Little Cayuse? Seeing you here, makes me hope that he is somewhere near."

"Yaw, he iss a nearness, but I tond't know vare," the baron admitted. "Budt I am sbeaking oof der Inchun vot haf shooldt adt me."

"Waugh, baron," cried Nomad; "I done thet leetle barkin' myself."

"You?"

"Didn't you rec'nize ther crack o' this ole rifle?"

"You? Vhy wouldt you be shoodting at me?"

"Waal, I thought you war an Injun."

"Himmell! Dhen dare vos two Inchuns!"

He pulled himself together again and laughed.

"I smell der schmokes oof your camp fire," he explained, "unt so I climb py der tob oof der hill yedt, and try to look a leedle town here. Unt der nexdt t'ing vot is habbening, a pullet comes flying py der site oof my headt, and vhen I choomp oop, so dot der nexdt vun he tond't git me, I slib my feedt. Unt—I am here."

"Where is Little Cayuse?" said the scout. "And how do you happen to be here?"

"He iss vere he iss—budt I tond't know; unt as for der odder kvestion, ve are here pecause ve haf run away from vare ve vos perfore ve come by dhis blace."

He got his breath again and walked slowly over to the fire, pelted with questions at every step.

"Yoost gif me time to gidt my t'inking cap on," he urged; "my headt iss going roundt yedt."

He sat down as solemnly, looked about, and took in the surroundings of the camp; then he pulled out his pipe, which came out in sections, for it was a long-stemmed German affair manufactured in the old country.

"I vas afraidt at der fairst dot he iss proke," he said.

He jointed the stem and filled the big bowl with tobacco. Not until the pipe was going would he say anything more, no matter how great the impatience of those who viewed his slow movements with dismay.

"Idt iss goot to dake der tizziness oudt oof der headt," he urged; "so I haf to make der smoke fairst."

When he had taken a dozen whiffs, with all the solemnity of an Indian pulling at the peace pipe, he condescended to ask questions, and to talk.

"You are here for vot?"

"Waal, fer one thing, we aire hyar huntin' fer you," said Nomad. "You ain't had no smallpox?"

"Vhy wouldt I haf him?"

"Waal, ef thet ain't a fool question; you'd have et bercuz ye couldn't git erway from et."

"Idt iss a surbrise py me dot you are here," said the baron. "Liddle Cayuse unt me ve are setting oudt to go ofer der moundains to findt you, unt pring you der news."

"Hand et over, then!"

The baron refused to be hurried.

"You rememper Harfey Brice," he said, "unt der young voman he haf marriedt; der young voman vot ve rescoded from der pandits?"

"I reckon we know all about et, baron," interrupted the impatient borderman. "They aire down wi' smallpox, at El Toro, an' Mrs. Brice's paw he is also down wi' smallpox, at El Toro. Jest cut out ther things thet we know, an' hustle along."

The baron stared at him.

"Vot are you sbeakin' mit by your moudth?"

"Oh, snakes! Cain't ye ever git ter no p'int, ner nuthin'?"

"So far as I am knowing idt," said the baron, "dare iss been no smallbox unt no measles unt no shicken box unt no whoobin' cough unt——"

"Waugh! What has ther' been, then? Git down to brass tacks?"

"Dare has been Inchuns."

"Thet all?"

"Aind't idt enough? Ve are coobed py der Inchuns oop in der mine house by El Toro yedt. Ve cand't git oudt, unt oof ve couldt, ve couldt nodt dake der vimmins py der moundains ofer, mit Inchuns hanging roundt. Unt der eadting idt iss gedt short, unt der vater idt iss get shorter, unt pooty soon ve are all going to be deadt mens togedder. So me unt Liddle Cayuse make der sneak, in der nighdt, unt ve sdart by der moundains ofer, to findt Puffalo Pill unt you unt Bawnee, unt vatefer odder vellers ve can gidt, to come to ower rescue. Yaw!"

The stem of his pipe went back into his mouth, and he began to puff again.

"Dot iss der whole sdory."

"And there was no smallpox?" said Pawnee.

"Anodder grazy asylum heardt from! Vot iss der meanness oof so mooch smallbox?"

"That is the way the news came to us; that Harvey Brice and his wife, with her father, Mr. Pierpont, together with you and Little Cayuse, were at El Toro, all down with smallpox. So we set out with all the medicines we could lay our hands on, and have been traveling for El Toro as fast as we could."

"So-o?"

He stared owlshly, and sucked at his pipe again.

"So idt vos a luckyness dot Nomadt shoodt at me on dop off der hill, unt dot I tidn't preak my necks gitting town here. Neidher oof us tond't haf to trafel so far now as der odder veller—aind't idt so? El Toro iss nodt so far as idt vos—nein! Unt ve can gidt dare——"

"How soon?" said the scout, when the baron hesitated.

"Two tays, I am oxbecting."

"And we shall have to go through this desert?"

"Yaw; El Toro iss by der odder site."

Buffalo Bill stood up and fired his rifle into the air.

"Vot iss?" said the German, staring.

"If Little Cayuse hears that it ought to draw him here."

Within ten minutes the feather and headband of the Piute were seen at the top of the hill, where he had stopped to reconnoiter.

When they shouted to him he came sliding down, and was soon in their midst.

The inquisitorial pump being applied, the Piute yielded information similar to that doled out by the baron.

Already they had learned what was before surmised,

that the Piute and the German had encountered the Brices and Pierpont in the San Felipe foothills, where Pierpont's party had gone to inspect the San Felipe gold mine, and that then they had become guides for the party down to El Toro.

On the way to El Toro the party had been attacked by Indians, who were apparently of the tribe that had worked as slaves in the gold mine, and they had driven the redskins off with difficulty. These Indians were led by a white man, and that fact had seemed to make them brave.

There had been a running fight, after that, until El Toro was reached; then the Indians had cooped them up in the mine building, and still surrounded it.

When matters became so desperate they could be endured no longer, Little Cayuse and the baron had volunteered to go through the lines of the Indians and secure help.

But they had been pursued, and more than once attempts had been made to assassinate them.

Little Cayuse's explorations, while the baron crept round on the hilltops, was to locate their foes, before proceeding farther.

"The thing that tangles my rope," commented Pawnee Bill, "is the singularity of those messages. Would enemies send those messages, asking us to rush down here to rescue our friends?"

"Yes; for they were lying messages. The smallpox scare was thrown into them," said the scout, "to make certain that we would answer the call."

"And their purpose was to lead us into a trap?"

"Nothing else."

"This white man, then, who led the Talis, must be the moving spirit, and I wish we knew who he is."

"Ther Yankee," said Nomad.

"And the girl, Nita Lobo?"

"His darter."

"You may be right, Nomad."

"I know et," the borderman declared.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SAND STORM.

Sure now that the desert trail offered the means of getting down to the copper mine at El Toro, they entered it without hesitation, and pushed the horses hard the remainder of the day.

That night they made a dry camp and gave the horses nearly all the water brought in the water bottles. For feed, the horses had only a little oats, saved up for a time like this.

They expected to get out of the desert by noon, basing this on information furnished by the Piute and the baron.

So they made an early start, being in the saddle before daybreak.

The sun came up red as a copper ball out of the

sandy waste. For an hour afterward the air was still—so still that no breath of it could be felt. The blue haze shrouding the distance lifted, and they saw peaks and hills.

Then the tricky mirage, of the kind that hovers over the plains and the dry lands of the Southwest, laid its mystery-working finger on the desert, and strange things began to occur.

Blue lakes came, then disappeared; blue rivers drew their ribbon curves across the distance; all were, without a doubt, streaks and strips of the blue sky reflected on the quiet, mirroring air strata lying over the sand.

Sometimes, as the blue areas changed, the weeds that grew in the alkaline hollows took on the appearance of slender trees, and seemed to bend and shake in the wind; often the trunks had sharp angles, like the apparent bend seen when a stick is thrust into placid water—a bend at the point of contact with the water.

These things, however, were too familiar to the experienced bordermen to elicit a second glance, or draw forth comment.

But when, at the base of one of the peaks, the haziness seemed to clear away, like the evaporation of breath blown on a mirror, they beheld there something which made them gasp and draw rein.

How far the distance was they could not tell, nor if the scene, apparently there, was at that spot, or far from it. But they saw the girl, Nita Lobo, as clearly as if she had not been half a mile away and saw her attacked by a tall man.

He rushed upon her from some hiding place, caught her by the shoulder, threw her down, then seemed to be beating her.

"Waugh!" gulped Nomad. "Er waugh-h!"

He bent forward in his saddle, sputtering and fuming.

"Does yer see et, Buffler?"

All saw it.

Even while the apparent castigation was being given the mirrorlike spot disappeared.

"Great snakes! That shore stirs up my pizen."

Nomad drove the spurs into Hide-rack.

"No use to race the lungs out of your horse," said Buffalo Bill. "We don't know where that was, nor how far off."

Nomad pulled in unwillingly.

"Right ye aire, Buffler! But what I saw I shore saw. War thet the Yankee, w'arin' diff'rent clo'es?"

"If that was the Yankee," said Pawnee, "what we saw seems to bear out our idea that she was assisting him in deceiving us, and then weakened, and deserted him. He met her, and, in fiendish fashion, he punished her."

Nomad turned to the baron, who was walking beside Hide-rack—they took turns at riding.

"Schnitz," he said, "you had er good look at thet wolf who war beatin' the gal."

"Yaw, I pedt you. When I seen him again he vill know me. Yedt I couldn't make oudt his face."

"You has also seen ther white man thet led ther Talis when they attacked ye."

"Nit. Ve ditn't seen him goot."

"What I'm gittin' at is—did thet critter look like thet white man?"

"Vot I seen oof dot white man idt vos in der darkness—yoost a liddle I seen him; unt he had no Inchun var baint, mit fedders."

"Then, how did ye know thet he war er white man?" howled the borderman. "Ther inacc'racy o' yer mis-information is so plum'—"

"By his voice," replied the baron placidly. "Unt lader he sent in a note by der El Toro mine, saying dot ve shouldt surrenter, or he vouldt shoodt all oof us. Dot note vos wridden by a white man in der Spanish lankwitch; budt idt iss signed by an Inchun name; it vos Dall Volf."

"Tall Wolf. Thet don't explain nothin'."

"Meppyso idt oxblains dot der Dall Volf iss der dall Yankee. Pooty soon ve are going to findt oudt."

But they were not to know about that as soon as they anticipated or hoped for.

With the quick passing of the miragy condition, the slumbering winds awoke and the dancing sand shapes began again their waltzing movements over the sandy plains.

Increasing minute by minute, the wind changed, until it was blowing a gale, that had an icy sting, as if somewhere hailstorms were in motion; the dust became blinding.

"There were hills off on the right, necarnis," said Pawnee, shouting through the roar of the sudden storm; "we saw some there when the mirages were on. As we can't stand this we'd better move toward them, don't you think?"

As the wind was blowing toward the hills mentioned, that helped materially when they turned their backs on it and rode through the whirling dust clouds, seeking shelter.

They bumped into the hills at the end of half an hour of brisk riding when they could hardly see, so thick the dust had grown.

Feeling along them, they sought for some cranny into which they could burrow with their horses.

After a time they found one that seemed to answer their need; it thrust a rocky shoulder toward the desert, and when they were behind that the wind was in a measure shut out, though the sand, taken high into the air, was rained down on them, and the dust was still suffocating.

Having thrown handkerchiefs over their faces, the riders were suffering less than the animals.

"We can get farther back, necarnis," said Pawnee, after a few minutes of exploration.

They burrowed farther, and found a hole that seemed to be the mouth of a cavern of considerable

size; their horses could enter it, and they were safe from the worst of the storm.

Nomad set out with Little Cayuse to explore the cave, and came back soon.

"Quar things back in thar, Buffler," he reported.

"Whiskizos?" said Pawnee. "You see them, you know, whenever it gets dark."

Noticing Little Cayuse edging along as if he had serious intentions of bolting from the cave, Pawnee Bill stopped him; then saw that the Piute was in a panic of fright.

"What's the trouble back there, Cayuse?" Buffalo Bill demanded.

The Piute backed against the wall, but did not answer.

"Buffler," Nomad explained, "we went back thar exploratin', ye know. Then we heerd Injuns talkin', we thought. After thet we seen eyes shinin' in ther dark. Now I has seen Injun eyes; yit never a one thet would shine in ther dark like the green eyes of a cat. And I has heerd Injun voices; yet them voices didn't come frum critters thet had eyes which would shine green in ther dark. It is thet what has throwed ther skeer inter ther Piute."

When the scout, Pawnee, and the baron accompanied Nomad and Little Cayuse to the point where the voices had been heard and the fiery green eyes seen, nothing was discovered.

"They has fled funder back inter ther cave," said Nomad. "Otherwise—"

"Oddervise vot?" demanded the baron.

"Waal, I'm goin' ter let some er you wise guys say what; not fer me no more! You jest makes fun when I expresses opinions thet ain't like yer own. I has noticed thet et is a turn o' mind harbored by some men—ter stick ter their own notions, and make sport o' fellers that happens ter differ."

With the possibility that Indians had taken refuge in the cavern from the fury of the storm, no one had a desire to push investigations; so they returned to the point where the horses remained.

An hour later, when the storm seemed lessening, a band of deer, or elk, heading for the desert, dashed upon them as they crouched in the darkness.

"There is the explanation of your mystery, Nomad," said Pawnee, with a laugh, as he jumped to one side to let the animals struggle by.

But even as he said it, the charging creatures seemed to utter Indian yells, and a flight of arrows fell in the midst of the scout's party.

In another moment the cavern was clear.

"Er waugh!" Nomad was whooping. "Strike er match, somebody."

Matches were struck.

An arrow had gone through the borderman's coat, and another had cut into the baron's shoe leather. But no one had been hurt.

"Cur'us-lookin' arrers," said Nomad, inspecting the

one that had come so near perforating him. "Tali, I guess. Fiery-eyed animiles shootin' Tali arrers is goin' some."

He was still commenting, when there came a quick rustle of footsteps, and in the darkness a form brushed past him.

It was as much an act of instinct as anything else which caused the foot of the borderman to shoot out. But it tumbled the form to the ground.

"Fiery-eyed elk, er a whiskizoo, er what; I has got ye!" he gritted, dropping down.

Then he yelled, in a scared tone:

"Waugh! This whatever-et-is animile is w'arin' er dress. Strike a match, won't ye, somebody, quick!"

Buffalo Bill flared a match, as Pawnee hastened to the borderman's assistance.

The flame fell on the white and frightened face of Nita Lobo.

Nomad tumbled backward as if he had seen a ghost, and for the moment no doubt that was what he thought.

But Pawnee Bill's hand had clutched her garments. Still, it was needless, as she made no struggle.

"Bring up that torch we have been saving, Pawnee," the scout requested, as the match burned toward extinction.

It was a kerosene torch, saved for emergencies. Pawnee got it out of his saddle pack and lighted it.

The girl was by this time recovering her wits.

"If you will release me," she said, in a voice that trembled, "I'll go on now."

Nomad, panting heavily, goggled at her.

"Whyever——"

Words failed him.

"Really, I'd like to go on now," she said.

But they thought the sand storm outside was no place for her. Above all, they wanted enlightenment. So instead of letting her go on they plied her with questions.

"Those animals were elk," she said, "with Indians on their backs—Tali Indians; there is a tribe of Talis south of here, and some of the warriors have trained a few elk and use them for riding, just as you do horses. The Talis came in here to escape the sand storm. I was in here for the same purpose.

"The source of my information I refuse to explain," she continued, when questioned further. "It isn't material that you should know it. Of course, I'm aware that you have all sorts of wild opinions about me, since I left your party without stopping to explain why I did it. I don't care to explain."

They informed her of the view given by the mirage.

That astonished her, and flushed her face. For a moment it seemed that she was about to make some sweeping disclosures, but after hesitating she again refused to explain.

Buffalo Bill played what he hoped would be a trump, when he brought out the letter she had written and sent off by a Tali messenger.

She stared at it by the light of the torch as if dazed. "You say you found this on a Tali Indian you captured?"

They acquainted her with all the circumstances.

"Again I refuse to explain," she said; but there were tears in her eyes.

Asked again about the Talis who had been in the cave, she repeated her declarations, but added that she thought none remained in the cave.

A search of the passages with the torch disclosed none.

When her determination to tell nothing could not be broken down, the scout repeated his declarations that they had for her only the kindest feelings, and added that if now she desired to go on with them, they would aid her all they could.

"I can see," she said, "that you think I am trying to join some one in El Toro."

But she remained in the cavern through the night, while the sand storm raved out its strength, and was grateful for the food they gave her. She was losing her beauty—her face had sharpened, her eyes were brighter, and it was clear that she had experienced mental suffering as well as physical.

She went on with them the next day, riding her own horse, which had been in the cave with her.

The sand storm had wiped out the desert trail. But the unerring instinct of Little Cayuse for direction enabled him to guide the party.

The El Toro hills were entered, when the animals were at the point of exhaustion, that afternoon.

Here was water and grass, with wood for fires; and in the hills game abounded. Here, too, were the troublesome Talis.

Beyond the hills, on the southern slope, was the El Toro copper mine, which the scout and his pards were so anxious to reach. But they could not go on until their horses were somewhat rested.

The girl showed unusual restlessness when the camp was pitched in the El Toro foothills.

Finally she began to talk with old Nomad.

"You have been in this part of the country before?" she asked.

"Round an' erbout et," he said; "I ain't never been right through this belt."

"There is a trail, I believe," she said, "leading from the El Toro copper mine down to the coast?"

"I'm told thar is; I ain't never seen et."

She had him describe it to her, as it had been described to him, and to indicate where it probably left the hills.

Nomad answered everything cheerfully and willingly. Though Nita Lobo puzzled him, and excited his distrust, yet he liked her. She had courage of a high order, and was able to rough it in a manner to captivate him.

The morning after, when the horses were made ready for the onward march, and old Nomad gallantly

assisted her to her saddle, Nita Lobo reached down her hand.

"Good-by, Mr. Nomad," she said; "you have been awfully kind to me, when you had no reason to be, and I'm not going to forget it. The others have been kind, too, but I seem to know you better, because we were together longer."

"Whyever aire ye sayin' good-by at this time?" he asked. "Fer yer pleasant words I'm thankin' ye, as any one would; but——"

"I'm saying good-by because I don't expect to see you again. I'm going to leave the party here and take that trail to the coast you were so good as to tell me all about last evening. Don't ask me why, for I can't tell you. But I do not want to go any farther."

The borderman flushed and stared.

"On thet trail," he objected, "thar may be Injuns, and men what aire mebbysso wuss; so o' course this hyar notion is jest too foolish."

When she refused to change her mind he called out to Buffalo Bill that Miss Lobo was talking of deserting.

"Good-by!" she said, as Buffalo Bill came toward her.

She seemed to fear that he might by force prevent her from carrying out her intention; so instead of greeting him at closer quarters, she pulled her horse round and cantered away.

"Good-by, everybody!" she called, and kissed the tips of her fingers to them.

CHAPTER XII.

AT EL TORO.

They did not follow her.

Their horses were not in good condition, was one reason; another was they did not care to force her to accompany them. The chief reason, however, was the need of hurrying on to the relief of their friends cooped up by Talis in the mine building.

They succeeded in crossing the rough hill trail that day.

As they descended, in the late afternoon, they saw the mine building still stood intact; but whether it was occupied and Talis lay in stealth round it, they could not then determine.

When they got down to the vicinity of the mine night had come, and evidence of the presence of Talis began to accumulate. Signal smoke had been seen, and with the coming of darkness a signal fire blazed on one hill, and was answered by a winking fire on another.

Stumbling on in the darkness, they ran into a Tali guard.

He was armed with a musket, which he shot off as he turned and fled.

Tali yells followed in sufficient volume to show that a strong force of Tali braves was encamped between them and the house at the mine.

The horses were retired, in charge of the baron, who grumbled mightily because this seemed to put him out of it.

While the other members of the party waited in the trail, Little Cayuse was sent forward to investigate.

He came back shortly with a report.

"Heap many Talis out front," he said; "make um powwow."

He could not understand what they were saying, but the guard, on falling back, had apparently reported the approach of encmies, and the Talis were getting ready to fight.

"White man chief," he reported, and this, coming last, was the most interesting of all.

"Did you get a look at that white man?" the scout asked.

"Ai."

"Describe him. I suppose there is a camp fire, or lodge fire."

"Small fire," said the Piute; "white man stoop by fire, and tall."

"Waugh!" snarled Nomad; "mebbysso ther Yankee. How war this critter dressed as to clo'es?"

"Tali war paint and plumes," said Little Cayuse.

"Deescriptive ernough, yit it don't put us on. But thet Yankee would look plum' funnier'n a circus clown, rig him out thet way. Ye heard him talkin', is ther way ye knowed he war white, instead of Injun, then mebbysso from his voice you could tell who he war?"

"All same white man that lead Talis before."

"You mean ther time when you and ther baron broke through and come huntin' fer us? This is ther critter who war in charge then?"

"Ai."

"I vote, necarnis, that we push on as far as possible, and then be ready to jump through, and get to the house, or make a fight, just as seems then advisable," said Pawnee Bill. "But if we do that we'll have to bring up the baron and abandon the animals; we can't leave Schnitz to run the risk of being killed out here."

"Guide us first, Cayuse, to the place where you saw and heard those things," the scout ordered; "then we can, perhaps, tell what is best for us to do."

But while they had been listening to the Piute's report, and discussing plans, the white man who led the Tali had been moving with them. He had scouts out, after the frightened trail guard came in, and they had cleverly located the talking white men.

So that, when the scout's small force advanced, they were suddenly attacked. A flight of arrows went over their heads; then the darkness rained Indians down on them—Indians who came screeching like demons.

The only thing that saved the scout and his friends was that when, following the ineffective arrow flight, the Indians rushed, they found no one in the trail; the four men who had been there had slipped to one side, where they lay flat, and the darkness hid them.

The Indians, suspecting something of the kind, drew

a close cordon of warriors to the right and left, and began to beat through the undergrowth, moving back in the direction of the mine.

"Buffler, this hyar ain't goin' accordin' ter ther way we stacked ther kyards," Nomad grumbled; "we're bein' driv' toward ther mine, and aire leavin' ther baron. Desartin' of a pard ain't never in my calc'lations."

The Indians seemed to hear even his husky grumble, and arrows came threshing round him.

"Choke down your objections for the moment," said the scout; "we've got to make a crawl pronto, if we don't want the Talis to get our hair."

"Pronto it is," said Pawnee, crawling at the heels of the scout. "This seems to be taking us straight to the El Toro mine, and I have a vivid recollection that is where we have longed to be."

"But not without Schnitz!" Nomad objected. "Oh, snakes! Thar's more arrers. One scratched my arm then; hope the dratted thing ain't pizen."

The movement of the concealed Talis was like that of game beaters trying to flush pheasants; they struck the bushes, even kicked into them, holding their arrows on the bowstrings ready for a shot if a form scudded into sight.

Steadily the three white men and the Piute were driven in toward the mine, until they began to think a trap lay there, and they were being crowded into it.

"These Talis have shore got more fightin' teeth than any we has seen yit," said Nomad; "hyartofore I ain't been thinkin' much of Talis when et come ter fightin'. Ef these aire like ther ones we seen workin' in thet San Felipe gold mine, they wouldn't have so much clear sand as they're now showin'."

"They are under a white man; that's to be borne in mind."

Off on the right, but still in the general direction of the mine, Indian drums began to boom; then Indian voices were heard, as if drum beaters and singers desired to cheer on the warriors who were trying to capture the daring white men:

"The Talis are men! Listen! The Talis are the thunder and the lightning that strikes! The Talis are men!"

Behind the stealthily moving white men and the Piute it was clear that in numbers the Talis were thickening; and now from more than a score of Indian throats war whoops burst, answering the song that had reached them.

Pawnee Bill was struck by an arrow, that made a flesh wound in his arm; Nomad received another arrow—but it did no greater damage than the first; and Little Cayuse cried out, when a feathered shaft whistled through his hair.

"We has got ter make a stand, Buffler, and give 'em ther cold lead," Nomad whispered; "we'll be as full o' arrers as pincushions aire o' pins purty soon, other-wise. And I dunno——"

His words, and the Talis war whoops, were broken into by a ringing cheer. It was sent by white men, and came from the front.

Buffalo Bill sprang to his feet.

"We'll unite with them," he said; "then make a finish fight of it, if we have to."

A mad dash through the darkness of thirty or forty yards followed. As they ran they yelled out to the white men to keep from being shot down by them. And from the rear came more war whoops, and flights of arrows, with the crashing of a few muskets.

"Who comes?" was called.

"Cody and comp'ny!" Nomad yelled back.

"Right this way; we hoped so!"

A gate stood open, in a high wall. In it, dimly outlined, were two men and a woman.

"Cody and company are certainly welcome," sounded in the familiar voice of Harvey Brice. "Hustle through."

His revolver arm swung upward, and he fired.

Jumping back as they passed inside, he closed the gate with a swinging bang; and dropped a bolt in place.

Futilely, a shower of arrows rained against the gate.

"Ther baron!" said Nomad. "He's out thar! Buffler, I'm slidin' ter ther help o' ther baron; open the gate thar, Brice."

Brice refused to open the gate.

"It's a miracle that you got through yourselves," he said; "and if you go back there you'll lose your life, Nomad; so I can't let you. I suppose you know who is in command of those redskins? It's Ramon Corral."

The name held a world of meaning.

He was the brainy and notorious outlaw for whom the Mexican government had offered rewards in vain. Buffalo Bill had captured him near the San Felipe mine, but had not been able to hold him.

"He has tried to burn us out, starve us out, and in

every way has tried to destroy us," said Brice, "since we have been in here; and his redskins—these Talis—cooped us up here on the very day of arrival; after they had failed to induce us by treachery to surrender.

"And it is because we are friends of Buffalo Bill. He has sworn to have the life of every friend of his; and the scout himself, and those close to him, he has sworn to capture, and give to the Talis for torture. It's an excellent program, from his standpoint. I'm sorry for the baron," Brice added; "but really, Nomad, there is no sense in your trying to go to his aid, and getting yourself killed."

Though this was an argument that satisfied Brice, it did not satisfy Buffalo Bill and his friends. The baron had gone back under orders. He was in danger because he had obeyed. And, apparently, he had been abandoned. Hence, agreeing with Nomad in their determination to aid the baron, they began to talk of a plan.

Harvey Brice and his wife, with her father, Ralph Pierpont, had so far stood the Tali siege well.

Though they had believed that the Piute and the baron would get through, and that Buffalo Bill would bring a rescue party, they were astonished that the party had arrived so soon.

A brief explanation cleared this up for them.

While they were still talking, a confused sound of fighting arose outside the gate.

Then the voice of the baron was flung up there in a wild bellow:

"Hellup! Hellup!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CAPTURE OF RAMON CORRAL.

Brice lifted the bolt of the door, and flung the door open.

Two figures were struggling on the ground. One was the baron; that could be told by his heavy voice; the other was, apparently, an Indian.

Buffalo Bill flung himself on the man with whom the baron fought, and snaked him through the open gate. Brice closed the gate, and dropped the bolt again, as a mass of Talis dashed up; the gate was literally flung in their faces.

Pierpont snatched up a lantern and flashed its light on the face of an Indian, now struggling in the arms of the scout and trying to get to his feet.

Releasing him and pushing him against the wall, the scout jumped back, and drew a revolver. The Indian leaped on the bolt, and was trying to lift it, but Nomad nailed him.

The arm of the "Indian" shot up, with a revolver clasped in the hand.

"Whatever happens," he yelled, "I get you!"

He dropped the revolver muzzle toward the scout's breast.

The scout ducked as the revolver shot a stream of fire at him, and hurled his revolver. The man evaded it, tried to shoot again; when the rope of Pawnee Bill, descending on him, clutched him round the neck, and flung him sprawling.

"The latest and best trick of the rope king," said the scout, as Pawnee followed this up by winding a coil of the rope round the body of the man in a way to fasten his legs and arms.

"And my guess is," the scout added, "that we have here Ramon Corral!"

"Fairst," said the German, struggling to wedge in his explanation, "he haf got me, unt I haf got him; unt afder dot idt vos bot' oof us on der ground togedder fightting like vild kittens."

Nomad wanted to hear this, and more; but he had flung himself on the painted figure and was "lifting" the weapons of the apparent Indian.

"Ernough hardware ter start er gun store," he chirruped, as he pitched a miscellaneous assortment of revolvers and knives out on the ground. "And now ter hear ther baron."

"I haf saidt idt," said the baron, fumbling for his pipe; a thing he did mechanically, in his excitement. "Vhen I hear der shoodting unt der Inchuns making so mooch oof a noisiness, I leaf der caballos unt make a sneak to see vot iss. Dot prought me der door py. Unt kneeling py idt vos dhits veller, vot Cody say iss, nodt an Inchun. So I choomp on him; dhen he choomp on me; unt ve make a mixings on der groundt. Unt eftervardst—vale, you knowed him!"

Jointing his pipe, he began to stuff tobacco into the big bowl.

"As for der horses—vale, dere ain't eeny oof dhem vort' as mooch as my Toofer muel; unt I oxpose I haf losdt him now yedt."

Little Cayuse brought up a basin of water.

"Heap fine, Pa-e-has-ka," he said; "take um paint off!"

Nomad dashed a handful in the man's face.

"Water is a precious article here," said Brice; "so go slow with that."

But Nomad had already followed up his movement by scrubbing the face of the painted man.

"Ramon Corral!" cried the scout.

Pawnee had been busy with the rope; now he pushed Corral against the wall, and told him to sit up.

"You're Ramon Corral," said the scout.

"An' a sight ye be," said Nomad; "wi' yer face half covered yit with paint, and that yard o' eagle feathers in yer war bonnet; you're some of a Tali, I take et."

The dark face of Ramon Corral, shining with water, was wrinkled in a scowl of fear.

"It doesn't matter whether you say you are Corral, or deny it," said Pawnee Bill; "remember that we have had a meeting before this, and we haven't forgotten how you look."

"You don't want to talk?" said Pierpont, seeing that Corral was likely to be stubborn. "Well, if you'll call off your Indians out there, perhaps we can come to some arrangement."

"The only arrangement that I can consent to," declared the scout, "can't include the release of this murdering scoundrel."

"You can't scare me!" said Corral; though his dark, half-painted face showed yellowish now under the light.

He upheld this declaration by stubbornly refusing to answer their questions. He would explain nothing.

Nomad, having turned from Corral, when the latter refused to talk, was exploring along the gate and the wall, when he thought he saw the earth moving beneath the wall, by the gate.

It resulted in the discovery that a hole had been mined there, on the outside, and that Indians were working in it.

This suggested an explanation of why Corral had been so close to the gate when the baron came along and ran into him.

Revolver bullets fired into the moving earth stopped the work of the burrowing redskins; and a watch was set there, to see that they did not return to it.

Twice during the night the Talis charged the gate, exhibiting a courage that was astonishing, in view of the fact that a number of them had not so long before been spiritless toilers in the San Felipe mine.

But with the coming of daylight they desisted from their furious efforts to capture the inclosed building.

Shortly after sunrise, however, they came into view again.

Once more they were yelling, and once more arrows whistled in the air.

Nomad was guarding the gate; and he flung it wide open; for in front of the Indians scampered the young woman—Nita Lobo.

"Right inside," he shouted to her, "and et don't cost ye nothin'!"

She dashed through and he closed and bolted the gate.

Arrows pattered on it; then all was still, and the Talis had again apparently vanished.

"I couldn't find that trail Mr. Nomad told me about," she explained; "so I couldn't do anything but come here. He told me the location of this house, and I knew you would reach it. As I came up to it, I thought no Indians were here, but when one of them jumped out of the bushes and caught my horse, I saw others; then I leaped down and ran for the gate."

The sharp running and the excitement had made her nearly breathless.

They gathered round her, congratulating her, asking questions, too, as well as praising her courage. Mrs. Harvey Brice drew her into the house.

Womanly sympathy and confidence could do no more than had been done before, however, in winning from Nita Lobo any statement that might clear up the mystery that had surrounded her.

CHAPTER XIV.

CONCLUSION.

The Talis having apparently disappeared in the morning, Buffalo Bill and Pawnee passed out at the gate, for the purpose of looking for the horses. It was thought barely possible the animals had not been located and taken off by the Indians.

It was a vain hope. The horses were gone.

They were returning, rather dispirited by this, for they valued the animals highly, when they beheld the feathered head of an Indian, between themselves and the gate.

"One of the ki-yis is still lingering," said the scout.

Another head became visible, beside that of the Indian.

"Deserted Jericho!" Pawnee whispered. "There is our Yankee with him!"

The heads disappeared.

"They are moving toward the gate," said Buffalo Bill. "Can't we rake them in?"

"I'm game to try it. I want to set my fingers on the neck of that rascally Yankee."

They crept on cautiously, yet so rapidly that they came up behind the white man and the Talis in a little while.

Two ropes whisked out.

Never were men more amazed than the Yankee and the Indian when the nooses dropped over their heads and the jerking of the ropes threw them down.

Before they could rise, Pawnee and Buffalo Bill were upon them, and they lay helpless under the muzzles of threatening revolvers.

"Waal, it's yeou!" sputtered the Yankee, when he saw the scouts.

He sat up and began to loosen the noose round his throat.

The scared Tali lay on the ground. Something white was in his hand.

"Better drop that little eccentricity of speech," said Buffalo Bill to the Yankee. "It don't go now."

"I snum, yeou're inclined to be pesky," the Yankee snarled. "But jest a word can explain what I was doin'."

"You were sneaking on the gate with this Tali for some underhanded purpose," said the scout.

"There yeou're wrong!" the Yankee protested. "I can prove it, if yeou will jest look at the white flag he is holdin'."

They saw that the Tali clutched a strip of white buckskin.

"It was a flag of truce I was convoyin' to ye," said the Yankee. "I fell in with the Talis a while back. They know that yeou've got their leader, Ramon Corral; they call him the Tall Wolf. So they was willin' tew send in a flag of truce. And yeou have violated that flag of truce right naow by jumpin' on us as we was bringin' it!"

"I think we'll take you and this Tali inside and let you do your talking in there," said the scout.

"That's a clear violation of a flag o' truce!" protested the Yankee. "Yeou ain't got no right tew do a thing like that to men who come to ye under a flag of truce."

"Then you also was a bearer of this flag of truce?"

"I was convoyin' this Indian; that's all. I am acquainted with ye; and I thought I could do it, and git inside with ye, in that way; and yeou could send back

yer answer then by the Injun; what he wants is to surrender the horses, if yeou will surrender Corral."

"How do you happen to know so much? Can you speak their language?"

"I met one that could talk English 'most as good as I can."

In spite of his protests they took him and the Indian through the gate and into the house.

Even after that the Yankee puzzled them. He began to talk once more of the Garden of Eden, and of his plans for finding it. He said this house could not be the Garden, for it was not a house. When his rambling became incoherent they stopped trying to get anything out of him, and turned to the Tali.

Fortunately, the Talis had chosen for their messenger a warrior who was somewhat familiar with Spanish; so that the scout and his friends had no trouble in talking with him.

He had been sent to confer, under the white flag, for the return of Roman Corral. The Talis promised for the release of Corral an abandonment of their campaign against the white men.

The Tali also declared that the man who called himself Adam was a very great friend of the Talis.

"You hear that!" said the scout to the Yankee.

"Everybody is my friend," he said; "that is, when they know me."

"If this man is a friend of the Talis, I will do this," said the scout to the messenger; "we will let you go, and you can say this to your friends outside: We will release this man for the return of our animals. But that is all we will do."

Nomad grumbled; but the thought of getting Hide-rack again reconciled him.

"Thet feller is er skunk, and I don't like ter see him git erway until we has at least found out who and what he is," he declared.

The Tali messenger departed with the word sent by the scout.

He was gone an hour.

During that time distant drum beating was heard, which seemed to indicate that the Talis had called a council, to consider the proposition.

When the Tali returned he not only carried the white flag, but he had the horses, strung together by hackamores roped to a lariat.

The Yankee became suddenly interested.

"I'm willin' tew go," he said, "sense you are provin' so unfriendly. But I tell yeou now that I'm a friend

of the Talis simply because I'm a friend of all men. Yeou see, being that I am Adam, all men are my descendants, even Injuns; and I have got to conduct myself accordin'."

"You might as well drop that!" said the scout.

"Adam, that's right; we're on!" Pawnee added.

Adam departed with the Tali; and the horses, left beside the gate, were brought in.

The Tali had made another demand, however, for the release of Ramon Corral; he had repeated, that if Corral was surrendered to them the Indians would depart.

"How long could we trust them to keep their word," said the scout, "if Ramon Corral were with them, to urge them to again attack us? Not five minutes."

It was clear, however, that without dangerous fighting they could not get through with their prisoner, Ramon Corral, until the Talis were worn out with long watching.

Considering the low condition of the larder at the El Toro mine, a long stay there was impossible.

But the Gordian knot was cut that night—cut by Nita Lobo.

Ramon Corral was a man in a thousand, when it came to ingenuity; so, though within the house and protected by the wall, he had been watched.

Nomad was on guard; for none was more reliable in work of that kind.

It had pleased the borderman that Nita Lobo had returned. He liked her. Some things connected with her various adventures still puzzled him; but he believed that whatever she had done, or was, she was not wholly to blame.

He tried to get some sort of confession out of her that evening, and that she might be more in a humor for revelations, he took supper with her. It was what he called a "little snack," and consisted of some food and coffee which she brought out to him by the gate, and ate with him there.

She told him many things that interested him.

She admitted she had a slight admixture of Indian blood. But in Mexico that is a thing so common as not to attract comment. She had been schooled for a while, she said, by certain convent sisters, down at San Pasquale, near the coast—not a great distance from the El Toro mine and the Mexican Cross Timbers.

She had been for a year or so in San Francisco, and had spent a year in the City of Mexico; but she had

spent many more years, apparently, in the mountains, in camping, and in the saddle; had, in truth, led a sort of gypsy life, wandering here and there.

As to how this had been done she was reticent; she gave a few broad hints and general statements, saying that some time she hoped she could tell Nomad more.

That night the borderman slept like a dead man.

When he awoke in the morning he was in a fuddled condition; in fact, he did not awake until Buffalo Bill aroused him.

"Have you been drugged?" said the scout, a sudden suspicion darting into his mind.

As Nomad started up a slip of writing dropped to the ground.

Buffalo Bill read it.

It was from Nita Lobo, and was addressed to the borderman:

"MY DEAR MR. NOMAD: You are so good and so kind that I have hated to do what I did; but it was the only way. When you read this I will be so far away that none of you can overtake me. Probably I shall never see you again, but I hope that you will still have a few kind thoughts for me. I told you something about myself; and here I tell a little more: My name is not Nita Lobo, but Nita Corral, and I am the daughter of Ramon Corral. Don't be shocked when you read this. He has been very badly treated by the officers of the law, and has a great hatred against Buffalo Bill. He thinks his life and liberty are in peril so long as Buffalo Bill and Buffalo Bill's friends live. He has told me so, and I know it is so. He knows the Talis well; in fact he has been kind to them, and helped them many times. One thing I did not tell you is that I myself have lived for months with the Talis. Of course I wanted to assist my father; but when I started in to help him I did not understand fully what he meant to do. I really thought that you and Buffalo Bill and the others were the very kind of men my father had said; and I have found out different. His designs against you were very bad, and I had agreed to help him. So we made up the messages. A messenger disguised as a rurale took one; and I took the other. At that time Mr. Brice and those with him were not at El Toro. But father knew they were in the country, and he intended to have the Talis strike them; and then, when you had come to this place, he meant to have the Talis strike you. But that is all over now, so far as I am concerned. He fell into your hands; and if you hold him I know that he will be hanged. That is a terrible thing—no matter what he has done—a terrible thing for me to contemplate. So I have released him, and he is going with me far from here. I shall use means to induce him to let you alone. As for that Yankee—I do not like him. I was sorry he came and joined

you. Father thinks he is a clever man, and he was trying to help father; but I think he is a bungler. But I am glad you let him go. He is one of father's friends—an American, who had to leave the States some years ago, and has been down in this country much of the time since. I have heard that he was called Kansas Charley. So, good-bye, Mr. Nomad—good, kind Mr. Nomad, and say good-bye to the others for me. I feel sure that I shall never see you again.

“NITA CORRAL.”

The old borderman was stupefied with astonishment, before the scout had finished reading this letter.

“Drugged!” he said. “Thet han’some gal drugged me! And she is ther darter——”

But he recovered quickly.

“No marter,” he said, when all were discussing it, “thet young ’oman ain’t half as much ter blame as et looks; ye’ve got to recklect what kind o’ blood she has got, and her ejication, and all. And you’ve got ter recklect thet when et come right down to obeyin’ Corral, she didn’t do et; she flunked, and showed thet she had a good heart, in spite of who her dad is.”

The letter and the escape of the girl and Corral were sources of amazement to every one.

“Kansas Charley,” said the scout; “you know who he is, Pawnee?”

“The man who robbed the U. P. express car at White Springs, five years ago, and killed the messenger. There was a big reward out for him.”

“He was no Yankee, though,” said the scout; “Kansas Charley was a Western road agent and confidence man. Why, you remember, Pawnee, the time he went into the faro bank at Golden?”

“I guess yes; every man in the West at that time will recollect that.”

“And down in Dodge; there he fleeced old Monkton, the cattle king, out of the roll that he had brought back from Kansas City for the sale of his cattle.”

“How mooch,” said the baron, “iss der revard dot iss offered for dhis Kansas Sharley?”

“About twenty thousand dollars, isn’t it, Cody?” said the scout.

“Vale, when you go back by der vay you tidn’t come—vhich iss down by der coast—I am going to sday by dhese hills in and collect dot revard.”

But the baron changed his mind before the time for departure came round.

How Nita Corral induced her bandit father to give over his attempt against the scouts was not known.

Nomad suggested that she drugged him, as she had shown her ability in that line, and the Indians carried Corral off while he was drugged. It seemed im-

probable; but where one guess was as good as another, that went as well as the next.

Anyway, the Talis vanished; they were not seen round the mine after the night of the escape of Ramon Corral.

The Yankee had vanished, too, along with the Talis.

Buffalo Bill had, however, accomplished his mission; which was to rescue the party cooped up at El Toro. It is true, the condition of affairs there was not as it had been pictured in the messages which had started him and his friends off on that wild mountain trail; still it was serious, and if he had not arrived it would have been a fatal condition for those ringed in there by the Talis.

The mountain trail by which the scout and his pards had come to El Toro was entirely too rough for a return over it, when another way was open from the mine down to the coast of the gulf.

There they found a vessel, and that took them up to the head of the gulf, where they found transportation back into the land of white men and civilization.

Pierpont concluded that after all he did not care to buy either a gold mine or a copper mine in regions so remote and so danger filled; in which conclusion he was wise.

THE END.

“Buffalo Bill and the Knife Wizard; or, Pawnee Bill’s Great Exhibition,” is the title of the thrilling story which will appear in the next issue. In this will be described a series of remarkable adventures through which the famous scout and his friends passed in Mexico. It is a story which will make the heart of a reader beat quickly as he sees snare after snare spread for popular heroes of the frontier in the course of their efforts to round up a band of desperate outlaws and their Tali Indian allies. It is No. 539, and will be out on September 9th.

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